

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/08
Coursework

Key messages

Good answers will:

1. Address the two questions and texts with clear and concise focus.
2. Explore in some detail how the writers create their particular effects; discussing the literary techniques used.
3. Support what is said with brief textual quotations and references.
4. Make some brief use of critical and/ or contextual material to support arguments.
5. Write on individually selected and/ or worded questions, making responses as personal as possible;
6. Ensure that the work submitted remains within the overall 3000 word limit.

General comments

There was a relatively small entry this session, but it was on the whole a very good entry; candidates had clearly been well taught and well prepared for their coursework, and centres demonstrated a good understanding of what is required of both candidates and teaching staff alike.

Text selection obviously varied from Centre to Centre, but as is always the case the best work tended to come from candidates who had apparently selected their own texts, drafted their own questions, and written with real independence and individuality. It is of course difficult for any Centre to allow complete freedom to their candidates, but where this is possible it is certainly a good thing to do. Even if all candidates use the same two texts they should be encouraged to offer different questions, and of course where appropriate to make any amendments suggested by the Cambridge advisor on receipt of the Outline Proposal Form (OPF). One thing to be avoided, however, is for any candidate, let alone all, to use exactly the same text and question as previous candidates from the Centre have done; there is always the possibility – though there was no evidence at all of this in 2016 – of some copying of others' work, but more importantly there will probably be a certain lack of freshness or vitality in what is being read and written. So a new pair of texts, or at least one of the two, should almost always be the case. If a Centre has any doubts about the suitability of either text, or of the pairing, it is essential that an OPF is submitted to Cambridge for each candidate before he or she begins work. Texts need not, of course be canonical ones, though almost all were, and there was certainly no doubting the suitability or appropriate academic challenge of anything used this session.

There were some minor issues raised around the genre of text selection. Drama was used by a number of candidates, and in most cases it was made clear that they saw the plays as pieces of theatre, and wrote of the particular visual and/or auditory effects created by the writers. This is not in any sense a Theatre Studies syllabus, but there does need to be at least some thoughtful response to how an audience might react to what they see and hear, as well as just to the words that they might be reading. Poetry was very widely used, and in most cases with some degree of critical understanding; however, not enough poems were mentioned by some candidates. Unless unusually long, or indeed unusually brief, it will always be expected that at least three or four poems will be considered in some detail, with two or three further ones more briefly alluded to in comparison or contrast.

Having said this, there were no serious concerns about any of the texts selected, and while some questions were arguably demanding and they were clearly accurately designed to stretch and challenge particular candidates. The marks offered by Centres were all close to agreed standards, with just occasionally a little severity or over-generosity, but nothing of any great concern. Centres annotated work fully and professionally, and where it was possible more than one marker had clearly been involved, often offering different marks, in which case a third marker was used as well. This is of course unrealistic in all but the

largest Centres, but where it is feasible it certainly adds weight to the final decision. It was not always made sufficiently clear how or why this agreed mark had been reached and centres should be sure to clarify these amendments. Suffice to say, however, that external moderation saw little evidence that the final marks were in any serious way incorrect.

It was, therefore, a very pleasing session overall; candidates and teaching staff alike had clearly worked efficiently and professionally; work was presented neatly and helpfully, with all appropriate paperwork correctly submitted. Everything made the external moderation a pleasure.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/31
Poetry and Prose

Key messages

All literature questions ask candidates to consider ways in which writers express their ideas and treat their concerns, successful responses focus on authors' choices of language and literary techniques, considering the effects that these might have on a reader or audience.

Essays which rely on paraphrase and narrative summary are not successful.

Points in essays are made much more convincingly if supported by detailed references and quotations.

Candidates should think carefully about the wording of the question they choose in order to select the most appropriate poems, stories or episodes from texts.

Answers to **(b)** passage questions should discuss the writing of the selected poem or extract in great detail. This is what is meant by the demand to 'comment closely'.

General comments

All the poetry and prose texts attracted a good number of answers, although some texts were more popular than others. Owen was much the preferred poet on the 33 variant, while *Songs of Ourselves* was preferred on 31 and 32. The prose was more mixed, with *Stories of Ourselves* the most popular text on the 31 variant, while this text shared a dominant position with *The Namesake* on the 32 variant. *The Namesake* was by far the most popular prose text on the 33 variant. On the drama, *A Man for All Seasons* was by far the most popular text across the world, with very few studying the Aidoo plays. Candidates have often responded very well to the dramatic techniques of Bolt's play as well as the issues it raises.

There does seem to have been an increase in candidates' confidence in attempting **(a)** questions. Although **(b)** answers still dominate, some texts on some variants attracted a comparatively high number of responses to **(a)** questions, with candidates in many cases choosing their references judiciously to construct their arguments. Where, on the novels, candidates wrote narrative accounts in response to these questions, they were much less successful.

Despite the continued popularity of the **(b)** passage-based question, many candidates do not deal with the wording to 'comment closely', in particular when answering on the prose texts. These questions are designed to give candidates the opportunity to examine the text in detail, which is why the passage is printed on the question paper. If only the content is explored it misses the focus of this type of question. Candidates should discuss aspects of the writing in the given extract; considering the impact of the writer's choices.

Comments on specific questions

Comments on this paper must be prefaced by the observation that they are based on a small number of candidates who took this variant.

Ted Hughes: *Selected Poems*

Question 1

- (a)** There were few answers to this question on Hughes' 'presentation of humankind' and they often illustrated the requirement for very careful choice of poems to respond to a specific stimulus. Candidates who concentrated exclusively on poems about animals found it difficult to achieve clear relevance, even when anthropomorphic readings were awkwardly imposed on the poems. There are many poems in the selection which are directly about human beings and candidates who focused their selection more carefully were on much stronger ground.

- (b) The majority of candidates answered on '*Hawk Roosting*'. The most successful responses clearly focused on the ways in which Hughes presents the hawk and offered personal and detailed analyses of structure, form and language to do this. Less cogent answers tended to discuss what the poem might mean using personal assertion which was not always fully supported.

Wilfred Owen: *Selected Poems*

Question 2

- (a) A small number of candidates responded to this question. Candidates appear to lack confidence in discussing those poems of Owen's which are not about the First World War, though the selection features several which have a wider range of subject matter. Candidates who were able to discuss that wider range, including '*On My Songs*', '*Storm*', '*Music*', '*To Eros*', '*Maundy Thursday*', '*Song of Songs*' and '*Shadwell Stair*', each of which featured in answers, were able to respond relevantly to this question, discussing Owen's treatment of art, inspiration, love, passion, and religious faith.
- (b) Candidates' frequently exclusive focus on Owen's war poetry also led to some curious readings of '*The Unreturning*', written between 1912 and 1913. While it is possible to read the poem as one about dead soldiers, and Examiners gave credit to well-argued and supported readings, such an approach naturally limited the more philosophical considerations of the poem as it deals with death, the after-life and the 'smothering wing' of didactic Christianity. There were some well-informed answers, the most confident of which were able to identify many of the ways in which the pessimistic mood is created and were able to offer detailed and personal analyses of them.

Songs of Ourselves

Question 3

- (a) There were some interesting interpretations of how nature might be interpreted, the most common and successful of which was by looking at the natural world and the way it can be seen to reflect humanity. Candidates chose a very wide range of poems, some of the most successful being Spenser's '*Sonnet 75*', Sidney's '*Sonnet 31*', Wroth's '*Sonnet 19*', Raleigh's '*Walsingham*', Shakespeare's '*Sonnet 18*', Waller's '*Go, Lovely Rose*' and Spenser's '*The Procession of the Seasons*'. Strong answers made use of detailed knowledge of the chosen poems to allow successful integration of quotations and references in a sustained argument. In these answers, apposite textual references were used to explore ways in which imagery and symbolism contribute to the meaning and effects of the poems. This latter point is important, as feature-spotting without reference to meaning does not support a strong analysis of a text. Even when the question has a stylistic focus, crafting a cogent essay is more fluently attained if a view and interpretation of the poems' meaning drives the argument.
- (b) Drayton's sonnet was a very popular option, though many candidates did not grasp its ironies and the poet's use of the final couplet. Many did not reference to the sonnet form and how Drayton uses it to develop the ideas of the poem. An interpretation that the poem expresses anger after the breakdown of a relationship was present in many essays, thus missing the mood and tone of the language. More successful responses recognised the tone of the octave, noting a weary resignation, with some productive comment on the reinforcement through repetition in 'glad, yea, glad' and the sweeping finality of 'no more', 'cleanly', 'for ever' and 'all our vows'. Some subtle answers noted that the apparent finality of 'Shake hands forever' is undermined by the run on sentences that lead into an imagined later meeting. Such essays, which often went on to discuss the personification of dying 'Passion' and grieving 'Faith' in the third quatrain, were able to comment on the final couplet's twist and the sudden re-emergence of a flicker of hope. Alert candidates were then able to see the whole poem as a device, self-dramatising and pleading, to maintain a relationship rather than to lament a failed one.

Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake*

Question 4

- (a) Candidates attempting this question saw Ashima's and Ashoke's relationship as the cornerstone of Lahiri's novel and noted that they represent the most stable relationship in the novel despite the lack of obvious intimacy. Less effective answers were narrative in style, recounting the relationship from its arrangement in India, through emigration to America, the birth of children and Ashoke's death. Such answers showed knowledge of the novel but were unable to develop convincing understanding of Lahiri's methods of presentation, which were at the heart of the question. More successful responses were able to consider the structure of the narrative, writing about the contrasts between different couples in the text. They specifically compared Ashima and Ashoke with American couples' greater manifestation of public affection and with Gogol's different relationships. Answers were often informed by useful awareness of ways in which cultural differences between India and America, and the differing ways Ashima and Ashoke respond to them, have an impact on their relationship. The roles of their children and Ashima's response to Ashoke's death were often seen as pivotal in the narrative.
- (b) This was a popular passage and candidates were well aware of its significance in the text, ultimately providing the impetus for Ashoke's emigration and new life in America. Fewer responses balanced that wider awareness with an examination of the detail of the writing of the passage, which is rich in sensory detail. Candidates should remember that the prime purpose of the (b) question is to provide a close analytical response to the writing of the passage. From the early isolation ('Immersed', 'lost' and 'unaware') at the opening through horrific details ('whispering hoarsely for help', 'Blood drenched', 'mangled limbs', and 'broken his pelvis'), to the detached reporting ('Holiday-Makers' Tryst with Death'), there was a great deal in the passage to repay careful reading and close commentary.

Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth*

Question 5

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There were very few responses to this question, which offered an opportunity to comment closely on the physical descriptions of Simon Rosedale and the nature of his dialogue with Lily. Most noted his ostentation with 'gold cigarette-case' and 'gold-tipped cigarette' between his 'plump jewelled fingers' and there was very occasional comment on a racial caricature. Most answers noted the clash between Rosedale and Lily, but responses which lapsed into summary of their dialogue, rather than looking at Rosedale's language and phrasing, were not successful.

Stories of Ourselves

Question 6

- (a) This question repaid careful choice of which two stories to compare, with candidates who had thought carefully about different kinds of final twists, and their effects on the reader, doing well. '*Meteor*' featured in many answers, candidates often writing effectively about the final human perspective, thoughtlessly killing the 'vicious little brutes' after the reader has gained a far fuller understanding of the ideals and technological advancement of Onn's species, through his own journal entries. Different kinds of shifts in perspective were noted at the end of '*The Village Saint*', with the village's re-evaluation of Mma-Mompatati, and of '*Games at Twilight*', with Ravi's victory turning to 'insignificance'. '*An Englishman's Home*', '*The Signalman*' and '*The Yellow Wall Paper*' were also stories discussed with success. While less confident responses relied on narrative to lead up to the ending, more assured work showed how the structural device is either subtly prepared for or comes as a surprise, and how that changes the reader's view of the story or characters as the end of the story is reached.
- (b) This was a very popular passage, with success dependent on a sustained focus on 'hopes and fears' and close commentary of Desai's writing. The strongest answers discussed ways in which the hopes and fears are connected and how Ravi's imagined, abstract sense of 'so much victory' and sensations 'he had never known' enables him to face the highly tangible fears in the shed. Much was made of the sensory language, considering how Desai makes Ravi's experience vivid

for the reader by using visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile imagery. While there was some thoughtful comment on the rich imagery of this passage, candidates were often less observant of the effects of the skilful syntax and sentence structure. A number of candidates offered a 'colonial' allegorical reading, but it was seldom convincing and often caused digression from close focus on the passage.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/32
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Comments on specific questions

Ted Hughes: *Selected Poems*

Question 1

- (a)** There were very few responses to this question, perhaps reflecting candidates' lack of confidence in dealing with Hughes poems where animals are not the subject matter. Indeed, despite the question's clear focus on the presentation of men, many of the answers focused on animal poems. While a careful use of a poem such as '*Thrushes*' could be relevant to this question, it needs a careful approach, which was missing in a large number of the essays. In a number of cases, candidates asserted that animals in poems represented human beings, without any textual evidence to support these views. Candidates who wrote about human brutality in warfare in '*Bayonet Charge*', or the loss and grief caused by war in '*Six Young Men*', avoided such problems and were able to address the question directly and successfully. There were also very interesting essays which discussed human creativity in '*The Thought Fox*', children and parental relationships

in *'Full Moon and Little Frieda'*, the unexpected humour and optimism in the presentation of the men in *'Football at Slack'* and some which made the question gender specific in robust discussions of marital relationships in *'Her Husband'*.

- (b) *'Thrushes'* was a very popular option and the initial word 'Terrifying' was picked up in nearly every essay. Successful responses noted that this was an unusual and surprising perspective on a small garden bird ('on the lawn'); those who viewed the thrush as a ferocious predator missed part of the impact of the poem. The surprising number of candidates who thought that thrushes were plants missed even more, and led to some curious readings of 'Dark, deadly eye' and 'delicate legs'. Better informed answers saw the thrush transformed by Hughes' verse into a deadly machine, picking up on the mechanical and military imagery of 'steel' and 'bullet'. The question asked about the development of Hughes' response, so answers which did not move far beyond such descriptions of the birds were partial in their treatment of the question, though the second and third stanzas were found much more challenging than the first. Less confident responses skirted around this section of the poem, but strong answers noted the connections Hughes makes between the 'genius' of the 'streamlined' efficiency of a predator and Mozart, and the contrast between that and the rest of humanity's vanity, indolence and self-absorption. Where these ideas were linked with discussion of the techniques Hughes uses to communicate them, particularly sentence length, rhythm and caesura, essays were very strong indeed.

Wilfred Owen: *Selected Poems*

Question 2

- (a) This was quite a popular question however; there was often a disappointing lack of focus on setting. Too often, candidates stated that the setting was the battlefield and proceeded to write standard essays on two war poems without particular regard to setting. Handled carefully, though, with well-chosen poems, the focus of war could be very successful. Although it did not appear often, *'Spring Offensive'* gave candidates much useful material to deal with, as it is a poem largely concerned with the landscape and the weather as the soldiers prepare for attack. There was good work on *'Anthem for Doomed Youth'*, showing how Owen creates the battlefield through auditory, tactile and visual imagery. When setting was seen as a particular occasion as well as a place, candidates discussed poems like *'The Sentry'* and *'Inspection'* effectively, while post-war medical facilities were often thoughtfully in focus when candidates wrote about *'Mental Cases'* and *'Disabled'*, though the close concern with the soldiers themselves in these poems made them more difficult to use successfully. Some of the strongest responses ignored the war poems altogether, producing some very interesting work on the religious concerns of *'Maundy Thursday'* and, in particular, on *'Shadwell Stair'*, where biographical context of Owen's homosexuality was often thoughtfully used.
- (b) *'Disabled'* was a very popular option, and while there were some general and descriptive answers, many candidates were able to write thoughtful and detailed commentaries. A distinguishing feature of very good, rather than competent, responses was being the ability to comment on aspects of Owen's presentation such as the third person perspective, the anonymity of the soldier, the reported thought in stanzas 4, 5 and 7 and the effects of the shifts in perspective. There were some effective discussions of the structure of the poem with its contrast between the soldier's present and past states, while many candidates commented on the imagery of blood, the use of colour, the images of emasculation and the mournful closing questions. Some very careful responses noted Owen's references to body parts throughout the poem – elbow, knees, face, thigh, leg, shoulder – and commented that in the final stanza only his 'soul' is left. While candidates often observe a rhyme scheme without commenting on its use or effects, with this poem a number of candidates were able to note how it works with the development of the poem, exploring the ways in which stanzas pick up rhymes from previous stanzas.

Songs of Ourselves

Question 3

- (a) Candidates tackling this question were usually able to identify two sonnets successfully and were usually able to give an account of their meaning. The question, though, was on the poets' use of the form, and even when candidates were able to use terms such as Elizabethan, Spenserian, Petrarchan, octave, sestet, couplet, volta and so on, there was overall a lack of confidence in engaging with how those features had been exploited by the writers in order to communicate their concerns effectively. All of the sonnets in the selection appeared in answers, the most popular being Drayton's, Spenser's, Shakespeare's and Wroth's. The strongest responses not only knew the conventions of the sonnet form but were able to show how they worked, discussing, for example, how the three quatrains in Spenser's '*Sonnet 75*' swap the perspective between the man and the woman before the final couplet clinches the poet's argument, or how the final couplet of Drayton's '*Sonnet 61*' creates a revaluation of the whole poem's mood and intention. Candidates who were alert to the final couplet of Shakespearean sonnets were also able to note the neatness of the conclusions to his two sonnets in the collection, after the development of the ideas through the quatrains.
- (b) This was by far the most frequently attempted question on the paper and produced a very wide range of responses. There were a number of errors including: some candidates believing that the poem is an Elizabethan sonnet, others unable to identify a rose, misreading 'deserts' for 'desserts', misunderstanding of 'Suffer' in line 14, or arguing that the poem expresses hatred and anger. There were also a large number of paraphrases of the poem, with inaccuracies showing insecure understanding. On the other hand, there were many vigorous, articulate and detailed essays, some of which took a fiercely feminist view of Waller's poem and the imperative demands the male speaker makes of the woman, who is objectified and valued only for her 'graces' and 'beauty'. The most successful recognised that the rose in the poem is both an emissary to the woman and a representative of her, being sent to bear the lover's messages but also being 'wondrous sweet and fair' like the lady. They also noted that the argument gathers urgency as the poem progresses, accentuating time, until the harsh 'Then die!' which begins the final stanza. These ideas fitted with the *carpe diem* reading of the poem and strong responses observed the poem's tensions between male desire, female coyness and unrelenting mortality in an alternatively emotionally involved and detached treatise on feminine appearance.

Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake*

Question 4

- (a) The significance of the train crash was widely understood and more confident candidates paid attention to the question's focus on the development of Ashoke's characterisation. Candidates who overlooked this prompt tended to rely on narrative summary of events following the crash and therefore did not write successful essays. Focused responses argued that Ashoke is shown to be better at adapting to American life than Ashima because he understands from the crash how important it is to seize life's chances. Some candidates tackled Ashoke's belief that the whole family unit 'came out from Gogol's overcoat' and his lifelong amazement at this miracle which means he strives continually to record the moment and convey its significance to Gogol. This led them to the issues of naming and cultural identity which lie at the heart of the novel. Some thoughtful and sensitive answers suggested that in many ways Lahiri presents Ashoke as the quiet hero of the novel who is only fully appreciated by Gogol in particular after his death. Other candidates also considered the importance of trains and travel to the novel as a whole, though this was only fully successful when linked to Ashoke's characterisation.
- (b) Candidates had no difficulty in engaging with the passage about Gogol's first experience of school and often wrote with thoughtful sensitivity. There was some assertion that Mrs Lapidus is domineering and culturally insensitive, though this overlooked the subtlety of Lahiri's portrayal of the misunderstandings between her and Ashoke. The concerns with Gogol's insecurity, the clash of cultural values and foreshadowings of later events were best made when closely linked to the detail of the passage. In this way candidates were able to comment well on Gogol's silence while he 'looks down at his sneakers', on Ashoke's 'careful, accented English', the different pronunciation of Nikhil and on Gogol gripping the pencil 'tightly'. There was some interesting discussion of different Bengali and American attitudes to children, comparing Ashoke's imperatives and decisiveness ('Don't...', 'No tears...' and 'he will grow accustomed...') with Mrs Lapidus' choices ('are you happy...', 'do you want?'), making the point that this is the first time Gogol is able to make choices. Some noted that this choice illustrates to Gogol that his parents are different and are treated differently, with their wishes easily overruled in America. Many were able to comment on the irony of his rejection of the name Nikhil at this point, which becomes his choice later in the novel, and

that this is one of the important moments concerning name and identity in the text. A few commented on the appropriateness of his rejection of the name at this point, as Nikhil means 'complete'.

Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth*

Question 5

- (a) Limited responses to this question were often restricted to a character summary of Simon Rosedale, focusing on his social ambitions, while more successful candidates used Rosedale as a springboard into discussion of social ambition in the novel as a whole, as the wording indicated. An informed knowledge of the text, enabling selection of key references, was also a feature of strong responses. Candidates with good knowledge of secondary characters did well, with several precise examples to pinpoint who is 'in' and who is 'out' and who hovers in the middle. The Welly Brys and Mattie Gormer were used to good effect. The best answers blended an overview of social ambition in the novel with discussion of how Wharton shows what is lost emotionally and spiritually when social status is gained, exemplified by the number of characters who fail to have a successful marriage. There was useful discussion of Gerty Farish as a foil character, used by Wharton to suggest that morality and social success are incompatible. Those who used the cue quotation to shape their responses often successfully noted that Rosedale's forthright manner contrasts with the hypocrisy of the old money families. Some candidates commented that his brashness is initially unattractive to the reader, but his honesty is more valued as the novel progresses.
- (b) Verbally and syntactically dense, many candidates found this a challenging passage and sometimes struggled to render its meaning effectively. Confusion about the identity of the 'dangerous lunatic' in line 11 was relatively frequent – some thought the phrase describes how Selden is moving. There were, though, many astute and observant answers, noting the 'change' in Selden once he sees Lily; most noted that he sidesteps real human contact to do what he usually does, which is to avoid action by retreating into his own thoughts. Though 'behaviour' was often not covered as well as 'thoughts', where candidates did pay attention to this part of the question, there were good points about Selden's 'mechanical' movements and his 'dropping' down into a seat. Candidates often responded with frustration to Selden and demonstrated thoughtful understanding of Wharton's language choices. His lawyer's vocabulary was detected in the 'burden of offence', the 'countercharges' and the 'original grievance', together with the point that this is how he avoids intimacy. Many picked up on the Christian diction of his Pilate-like 'wash[ing] of hands' and his exclusion from 'free communion' as another sign of his failure to connect. While Selden's thoughts regarding Dorset were not always successfully discussed, there were good comments on his thoughts about Bertha and the danger she represents. Comment on 'last round of powder' and 'defensive missile' rounded off the responses well, often with the coy observation that he knows her extremely well.

Stories of Ourselves

Question 6

- (a) The choice of views or values in the question gave candidates a very wide choice of stories to choose from, so many of the stories in the selection featured in answers. As ever, a key discriminator was the degree of detailed textual knowledge, with some candidates relying on generalised narrative, while others were able to make precise references and support their arguments with quotations from their chosen stories. Success often depended too on the clash of values being clearly defined to enable a focused discussion of the stories. This meant that *'Meteor'* was often a very successful choice, enabling candidates to explore not only the different world views of the human beings and the tiny aliens but also Wyndham's narrative method, which places those different views side by side as he switches between third person narrative and Onn's journal. Discussions of Grace's *'Journey'* were also often successful, looking at different attitudes to land ownership between the Maori and Pakeha points of view, especially if that discussion was focused on the exchange of dialogue in the real estate office. *'The Lemon Orchard'* featured frequently; with candidates noting that the physical clash is on the verge of extreme violence, a clash between not only race in the Apartheid regime, but between educated and uneducated. It is a clash that la Guma portrays through physical descriptions of threat but also through demeaning racist terminology in the dialogue. Other stories successfully employed included *'Games at Twilight'*, *'The Yellow Wall Paper'*, *'The Village Saint'* and *'Secrets'*.

- (b) Candidates engaged very well with this extremely popular extract, often seeing the narrator's final escape from the oppressions of patriarchy at the end. Candidates in the higher mark ranges offered more subtle readings, alert to ambiguities and irony. By acknowledging the narrator's gnawing of the bedstead and her exclamatory exaggerated style, many better candidates noticed that the striking ending demonstrates both the narrator's mania and her escape and therefore can be inferred as ironic and pitiful. Strong answers demonstrated a clear awareness of how the story has built up to this point in the narrative and had a clear sense of the narrator's confinement and escape, enabling them to comment on the passage's effectiveness as an ending. Successful answers paid attention to the use of first person narrative, the use of short or fragmentary sentences and paragraphs and the increasingly assertive and violent statements and exclamations. In such a way they were able to acknowledge the reader's discovery that the narrator has been gnawing the bedstead and that the mark on the wall is from her constant circling, so that the reader is able to make detached judgments of her irrational behaviour through her own narration. There was also appreciation of the melding of the narrator and the woman in the wallpaper, the wild descriptions of 'strangled heads and bulbous eyes', the demeaning 'young man' and 'John, dear' and the black humour of having to 'creep over him every time'.

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Ted Hughes: *Selected Poems*

Question 1

- (a)** In many cases, candidates seemed to ignore the wording of this question and wrote essays on two poems about animals. Some imposed metaphoric readings on animal poems, arguing that '*Hawk Roosting*', for example, is really about human beings rather than a hawk. Neither approach was successful – it is vital that candidates carefully consider the implications of the wording of the questions. More successful answers sometimes looked at those poems where Hughes makes connections or comparisons between the animal and human worlds, considering, for example, '*Thrushes*', '*A March Calf*' or '*View of a Pig*'. Humanity's place within the natural world in '*Wind*' was sometimes discussed effectively, though often the most successful answers were those by candidates who looked squarely at 'the presentation of human beings'. Leaning just enough on biographical context, there were some excellent essays on '*You Hated Spain*' and '*The Tender Place*', while others looked at the war poems '*Bayonet Charge*' and '*Six Young Men*', considering

their differing perspectives. Other poems discussed interestingly were *'The Thought-Fox'*, *'Her Husband'*, *'Full Moon and Little Frieda'* and *'Meeting'*.

- (b) This extract from *'Skylarks'* was not widely attempted. On the whole, answers suggested that candidates were not very confident with this poem, hampered in many cases by uncertainty about what a lark is. While all identified it as a bird, those who viewed the lark as a vicious blood-thirsty predator were wide of the mark and misinterpreted the lines 'Crueller than owl or eagle' and 'Obedient as to death a dead thing.' Stronger responses were able to discuss the lark as a bird driven by instinct to fly high and sing and identified some of the ways in which Hughes uses the unusual form of the poem to communicate these ideas. Some commented that the long, arrow-like shape of line 6 is followed by a short dense stanza of truncated lines, imitating the packed muscle of the bird's chest. The subsequent repetition of the adjective 'leaden' is used both to suggest the power of that muscle but also the difficulty in pulling against the downward force of gravity. Some candidates observed that lines 22–24 create a visual impression of the climbing lark, getting smaller with perspective, while line 25 uses the word 'Obedient', expressing its powerlessness to do anything else. The occasional sharp answer noted that the repetition of 'O lark' in the third section suggests the bird's repeated 'gaspings', the song is presented as being both desperate through 'gape', 'gaspings' and 'Rip in and out' and Romantic- 'a breaker of ocean milling the shingle'- brought together in the paradoxical 'Joy! Help! Joy! Help!' at the end of the extract.

Wilfred Owen: *Selected Poems*

Question 2

- (a) As with the Hughes (a) question, this was another where many candidates wrote what they had pre-prepared rather than responding to the specific prompt of the question. Examiners saw, therefore, many essays on the presentation of war with little consideration of the viewpoints. Others glanced at the question by stating that Owen's point of view is that war is terrible and proceeded with a generic essay. While Examiners gave as much credit as they could, the higher level of marks was reserved for those candidates who read the question carefully and responded appropriately, choosing their poems carefully to ensure a relevant, focused discussion. Some excellent answers went straight to poems such as *'Inspection'* and looked at the way Owen skilfully creates different voices in his poetry and the way those voices and the views they express might conflict. Some striking responses discussed *'The Last Laugh'*, considering the way the poem gives viewpoints to the weaponry itself. Other poems successfully used in this way were *'The Letter'* and *'The Dead-Beat'*. While candidates who argued that poems written at different times showed Owen's changing view of the war, these often hit the problem of assuming that Owen's point of view is expressed directly by the poem's speaker in all cases. *'Disabled'*, for example, was frequently used, often with little recognition that the disabled soldier is not the narrator creating awkward readings of the viewpoints in the poem and how Owen presents them.
- (b) Despite the question's very clear focus on 'miners and coal mining', many candidates discussed *'Miners'* purely as a war poem, which was limiting. Others, however, were well informed about the context of the poem's composition and used that information sensibly to guide their response. Strong answers looked closely at the creation of a gentle mood as coal burns in the 'hearth' at the beginning of the poem and the reflection on the ancientness of coal itself, composed of prehistoric compressed 'leaves/And smothered ferns' before the shift to a different kind of vocabulary and mood after stanza 4. Confident candidates understood Owen's eventual linking of the experiences of miners and soldiers sacrificing their lives in different 'dark pits', the strongest answers explaining how the imagery associated both with miners and soldiers is developed in stanzas 4–6. This often led to recognition of ways in which the final two stanzas suggest the ignorance of those who benefit from mining and war as they 'sit soft-chaired'; some also noted the difference between these two worlds and that the voice of the poem identifies himself with the miners and soldiers in the final lines.

Songs of Ourselves

Question 3

- (a) Too few responses to make a general comment appropriate.
- (b) There was not a large number of responses on Wyatt's poem and a significant proportion of those did not tackle it with confidence. Discussions of it often lacked detail and were simplistic in interpretation, overlooking the poem's development and ambiguity. Stronger answers not only showed a knowledge and understanding of the poem, but were also able to comment on Wyatt's language and the three stanza structure of the poem which controls the development of the ideas. The predatory language of the first stanza was noted by several candidates and a few picked up the paradox between the women who are both 'stalking' and 'gentle, tame and meek'. The change to 'wild', 'range' and 'Busily seeking' was quite widely noted, however, before the second stanza's focus on one 'special' occasion. There was some discussion of promiscuity and some candidates picked up the subtle eroticism of the stanza, reinforced by the sibilance. Some noted how this stanza's dreamlike tone is certified as real at the beginning of the third stanza, though few noted how that assertion is emphasised by the meter. Candidates were more confident with the tone of disillusion and bitterness with which the poem ends.

Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake*

Question 4

- (a) While there was certainly a number of narrative essays which rehearsed a character summary of Ashima, there were many which successfully used the cue quotation as a prompt to discuss the development of her role through the novel. There was appropriate focus on her role as the preserver of tradition, the link to Calcutta and embodiment of absolute loyalty to marriage and family. Her role as creator of a new extended family of Bengali ex-pats was noted and that, as she makes America 'home', she becomes a source of help to more recent newcomers. There were some interesting comments on her associations with recurring motifs, such as food and the telephone, representing key cultural links and communication between members of the Ganguli family.
- (b) The party passage attracted an enormous number of responses and in nearly every case, candidates answered with enthusiasm and sensitivity. There were some exceptions, including those who mistakenly argued that the central character rejects the name 'Gogol' because it is Indian, and adopts the name 'Nikhil' because it is American. This is a crucial misunderstanding. However, there were many careful and detailed readings of the passage, examining ways in which Lahiri presents Gogol's social awkwardness, the characteristic American qualities of Kim and the exploration of Gogol's thought processes as he pauses before introducing himself as Nikhil. The section narrating his introducing himself to Kim and her response was often very carefully and successfully analysed, with its interplay of dialogue, thoughts and physical responses. Many noted the new freedoms which changing his name gives Gogol, of which both he ('protected by an invisible shield') and his friends ('I can't believe you kissed her, Gogol') are conscious. Good answers contextualised this moment in the novel within its concerns with naming and identity, noting that this is the moment he separates himself from his childhood identity and that he later formalises his switch to Nikhil.

Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth*

Question 5

- (a) The question's phrasing, asking for a personal response, meant that candidates could tackle it even if they were unaware of the source of the novel's title in the Book of Ecclesiastes ('The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.')
- However, knowledge that the title is taken from a Biblical quotation helped many candidates shape their response as they recognised both the irony and the social criticism of Wharton's choice of title. Approaches varied widely, with some interesting discussions of the use of the various houses in the novel, none of them 'homes', and how Lily finds herself always a rootless guest. Other candidates referred to selected incidents within the novel which illustrate the heartlessness and mirthlessness of society, while some commented on Wharton's use of Selden and Gerty as two

characters on the periphery or outside the 'House of Mirth'. Some considered the novel's tragic end as the final confirmation of the irony of the title.

- (b) There were some sound and engaged responses to Lily's accidental meeting with George Dorset and answers often expressed the sense that this was yet another example of characters who miss the chance for real friendship and mutual support because of a slavish obedience to social conventions – 'we can't see each other', 'it's impossible'. There were also some general but relevant comments about male/female relationships, with the observation that secret adultery in this society is more acceptable than being seen in innocent conversation. There were some well-focused discussions of George's actions and Wharton's presentation of high emotion in a rather inarticulate man and candidates were sensitive to the fine balance between propriety, sense of injury and the wish to be kind in Lily's language. Very strong answers looked closely at the construction of the dialogue, with some precise analysis of syntax and punctuation – the way in which the frequent dashes, exclamations and questions indicate the awkwardness of the encounter, for example.

Stories of Ourselves

Question 6

- (a) Settings were interpreted quite widely; though most candidates focused on the physical locations of their chosen stories, some discussed instead wider contextual settings. Where these were clear within the story and have an impact upon it, as in the Apartheid setting of 'The Lemon Orchard', such an approach worked well, as it is directly identifiable in the character attitudes and language of the story. The colonial metaphor reading of 'Games at Twilight' was much less successful, as this is not evident within the story itself. The most successful essays often dealt with 'The Lemon Orchard' and 'The Yellow Wall Paper' as in both there is a clear physical setting – the orchard and the room – as well as the wider contextual settings of the Apartheid regime and a society which patronises and degrades women. This allowed candidates to discuss direct features of the writing which established those places through colour, light, sound and smell as well as how those are representative of, or in contrast to, the context. Physical settings were also very well discussed in Lim's 'Journey', 'The Signaller', 'The Village Saint' and 'Games at Twilight', while a very few focused on the setting as the central aspect of 'An Englishman's Home'. Successful responses depended on the text being known in enough detail to be able to explore the writer's presentation; general descriptions did not contribute to competent answers.
- (b) The answers to the passage from 'The Stoat' suggested that this was one of the less popular and well known stories, which interestingly in many cases led candidates to focus much more closely on the passage itself rather than recount the story from which it is taken. Most of the answers found something to say about each of the relationships in the passage, including that between the son and his uncle and candidates tended to find the four of them a dysfunctional group. Strong answers were able to pick up a lot of the detail in the writing, with the importance of the verb 'sang' in l.11 before ideas of relationships are undercut by discussion of money. Candidates noted that the son creates distance between himself and his father by citing his uncle's offer of a loan, suggesting an uneasy relationship, and many were shocked by the father's decision to 'Clear out' after Miss McCabe's heart attack. There was discussion of the bluntness of the dialogue from l.24, which undermines any sense of affection felt by the father towards Miss McCabe, while showing the son's detachment and distaste. Not many candidates observed that, although written in the third person, the story is told from the son's point of view, so his critical view of his father is strongly communicated. A good number did comment, though, on the provenance of the rabbit at the beginning of the passage and the relevance of the story's title.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/41
Drama

Key messages

Discussions of a play need to be constantly focused on the text as a piece of writing which is performed. Passage-based **(b)** question responses should involve candidates in close discussion of the form, structure and language of the passage presented rather than as a general overview of techniques. Candidates need to remember that their insights need to be conveyed in a structured, developed argument as series of coherently linked points.

General comments

Readers should be aware that this variant of the paper is taken by comparatively few candidates, and thus Examiners may not have seen a full range of marks across all the questions.

As a genre paper candidates were highly rewarded if they were able to use matters of genre (stage directions being perhaps the most obvious) as a means of furthering critical discussion. Weaker responses showed knowledge of the events of a text and often of character. More sophisticated responses were able to show how the writers shape scenes in order to bring out the characters or themes that they are exploring. In terms of personal response candidates should be aware that this does not come through enthusing – rather it emerges from a response as a whole that shows a candidate’s engagement with a text. Rather than being summaries of teacher-led interpretations, responses that show a stronger personal response often use unusual examples or can focus interpretations in interesting, original ways.

Candidates who write a plan for their essays tend to do better. These responses have a firmer sense of direction, and in the case of **(b)** answers they are likely to take a more strategic view and avoid the line by line approach that often leads to a perfectly good range of points never really being synthesised into an effective argument.

At their best, responses were closely argued and intelligent, showing a close knowledge and understanding of both what is going on and of the author’s methods. Less successful responses often veered towards narrative, paraphrase or failed to engage fully with the particular terms of the question.

Comments on specific questions

Ama Ata Aidoo: *The Dilemma of a Ghost* and *Anowa*

Question 1

- (a)** Most responses were able to give an account of Eulalie’s character and of her background. Better responses were able to place her feelings of disconnection within the dramatic structure of the play, giving examples of her unwillingness to compromise, or of the way that other characters treat her. The best responses were able to respond fully to the ‘with what effects’ of the question and see that the presentation of Eulalie presents a dramatic portrait of an inherently conservative society set against the forces for change that are starting to confront it.

- (b) Responses showed understanding of the situation and of the choric role of the Old Man and Old Woman. Better answers were able to see the explications of their speeches as representative of communal, traditional values. There was some useful discussion of the imagery of some of the speeches at times.

William Shakespeare: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Question 2

- (a) A small number of responses took 'foolishness' to mean silliness, and thus focused on the more obviously comical moments in the play. Better answers, of course, realised that foolishness in the play comes from illusion and delusion and is often centred round the farcical plot and the limitations of understanding seen in the various lovers. One or two stronger answers were able to point out that the mechanicals' play provides precisely the gloss on lovers' behaviour that exposes the blindness and immaturity of the way that love that is often presented in the play.
- (b) Most responses were quick to contextualise the passage in terms of the plot of the play. More sophisticated responses dwelt more fully on the changes to Oberon's language ('sweet queen') and on aspects of reconciliation ('new in amity'). Only the very best answers dealt with the structure of the language forms presented – the spell of lines 29–33 and the quatrains of lines 55–63 – both of which many saw as adding to the atmosphere of peace and delight in the passage.

William Shakespeare: *Antony and Cleopatra*

Question 3

- (a) A number of responses focused on Cleopatra as the symbol and embodiment of Egypt. This was a perfectly legitimate approach. Other responses were keen to outline the pleasures of Egypt as a place, often by contrasting (as a means of covering 'dramatic presentation') its warmth and appeal with the rather more austere presentation of Rome. Answers that evoked particular moments did well. Less convincing response tended to assert points without close textual reference. There were some very good responses that channelled the question through the eyes of Enobarbas or other more minor characters as they described their experiences 'in the east.'
- (b) Many of the responses here offered a largely narrative focus. Almost all were able to comment on Antony's loss of honour, but comments on the scale of Antony's love for Cleopatra were not fully developed in terms of analysis of the extravagant language that he uses. Considering the question's instruction to consider how an audience might react; the actual dramatic event of the passage – Eros's suicide was often very scantily treated, despite it being a surprising reversal of what the audience might anticipate is going to happen.

Robert Bolt: *A Man for All Seasons*

Question 4

- (a) All candidates were able to give examples of different kinds of betrayal of trust, often linked to betrayal of friendship. Better responses, of course, detailed particular moments and showed awareness of how the different betrayals affect More psychologically. Some rather more sophisticated answers were able to tussle with the idea that More's conscience forces him into a betrayal of his wife and family.
- (b) Most responses dealt with the relationship between More and Margaret with some skill. There was also useful comment on the way in which More handles Roper and on the positive atmosphere of gentle humanity conveyed. Responses were less convincing on 'at this point in the play' and often missed opportunities to place the extract in context as a means of characterising the forces that are gathering against More, as hinted at towards the end of the passage.

Alan Ayckbourn: *Absurd Person Singular*

Question 5

- (a) The small number of responses to this question demonstrated some understanding of how Ayckbourn uses farce and dramatic situation to illustrate a number of rather dark aspects of human nature.
- (b) In the responses seen there was sensible exploration of the scene and a focus on the contrast between Jane's frantic cleaning and her complete ignorance of Eva's mental state. In many instances, more could have been done to interpret the stage directions in order to focus on the absurdity and black comedy presented here.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/42
Drama

Key messages

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As a genre paper candidates were highly rewarded if they were able to use matters of genre (stage directions being perhaps the most obvious) as a means of furthering critical discussion. Weaker responses showed knowledge of the events of a text and often of character. More sophisticated responses were able to show how the writers shape scenes in order to bring out the characters or themes that they are exploring. In terms of personal response candidates should be aware that this does not come through enthusing – rather it emerges from a response as a whole that shows a candidate’s engagement with a text. Rather than being summaries of teacher-led interpretations, responses that show a stronger personal response often use unusual examples or can focus interpretations in interesting, original ways.

Candidates who write a plan for their essays tend to do better. These responses have a firmer sense of direction, and in the case of **(b)** answers they are likely to take a more strategic view and avoid the line by line approach that often leads to a perfectly good range of points never really being synthesised into an effective argument.

At their best, responses were closely argued and intelligent, showing a close knowledge and understanding of both what is going on and of the author’s methods. Less successful responses often veered towards narrative, paraphrase or failed to engage fully with the particular terms of the question.

Comments on specific questions

Ama Ata Aidoo: *The Dilemma of a Ghost* and *Anowa*

Question 1

- (a)** Responses to this question ranged across the two plays, looking at the various choric figures that provide a perspective on the action for the audience. An ability to discuss the effects created, rather than simply enumerating the instances was a key discriminator for better responses. There were some engaging discussions of a society where an oral tradition of story-telling and moralising predominates.
- (b)** Issues raised by the passage were clearly communicated by virtually all candidates. They were able to see how the issue of childlessness and American liberal value provide both shock and bewilderment for Ato’s family and friends. The best responses explored the complexity of the scene, demonstrating that our sympathies are divided. Despite the richness of the scene and the very clear dramatic oppositions, many candidates dealt with the passage in terms of issues rather than dramatic creation. There was much to say, for example, about the portrayal of Ato, who is

stuck in the middle and victim to Eulalie's ambiguous feelings towards him as seen when she calls him 'native boy' and then later 'my gallant black knight.'

William Shakespeare: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Question 2

- (a) The best responses to this question moved speedily away from simply recounting instances of the two worlds coinciding. Instead, they focused on the various ways in which the clashes show how the two worlds illuminate each other in the play. Parallels between the two run throughout, and detailed discussion of particular moments helped to point out the big themes of the play such as love and disillusionment. Less effective responses focused on plot and tended to stress moments of comedy (the ass head) or of confusion (the love potion).
- (b) Responses were quick to contextualise the moment but less ready to deal with the atmosphere and sense of resolution evoked in the passage, some recognised the harmony that comes out of chaos. At higher levels, responses looked at the structural significance of the scene and at what this might mean for the play's overall effects and themes. There were quite a few responses that were little more than narratives or paraphrases of the extract and the delights of the language were often not fully exploited. Many responses focused on Puck as the framing device, often seeing it as being fitting that he concludes the action, as he was the agent for it in the first place. Many answers rightly pointed out that this is the moment where the fairy and the human world separate themselves out again. There was some useful commentary at times on the role of song and dance. Only the best answers tussled with the fact that Puck is addressing the audience directly, thus "breaking the fourth wall" and shattering the world of the play, a key factor when the question asks for audience reaction.

William Shakespeare: *Antony and Cleopatra*

Question 3

- (a) All but the most basic of responses were able to locate examples of betrayal in the play. Lower level responses focused on presenting a catalogue of betrayals; better responses looked carefully at the different types of betrayal, that of lovers, politicians and friends. Very good answers were able to examine the language of betrayal and see that it is not simply presented as a matter of binary oppositions in the play; with many of the inner struggles about loyalty and betrayal acted out before us. A number of responses focused almost entirely on Cleopatra's fickleness which was a legitimate but slightly limited approach to take.
- (b) Responses toward the lower end often tracked the passage, making comment along the way. Better answers dealt with the 'arc' of the scene and with the various ways in which Cleopatra is presented and, indeed, the ways in which she chooses to present herself. Discussions of the richness of the language, its variety, and the change from blank verse to prose with the arrival of the clown tended to be confined to answers that were competent or better. The best responses offered analysis of the whole extract, often tussling with the tension between comic and tragic action as presented here. The comic and ironic functions of the clown were often implicitly understood without, perhaps, being fully enough analysed.

Robert Bolt: *A Man for All Seasons*

Question 4

- (a) For some candidates the question simplified itself into a matter of conflicts in the play. The word 'inner' made things slightly more challenging, as there was a need to see how the action and language of the play – More's dealing with others – enable an audience to understand the conflicts that are going on within his character. Thus analysis of his careful choice of words in scenes of interrogation, or his pained reaction to the effect that his conscience is having on his family enable us to see that More's stance does not come without inner anguish. The best responses explored particular moments and conveyed a strong sense of Bolt's dramatic techniques.
- (b) As always with (b) questions, there were some responses that simply catalogued what is going on here. Better responses were able to see aspects of dramatic tension and recognise how More's laconic, considered remarks only serve to infuriate Cromwell still further. Sensible points were often

made about how it is both the crown and the church that are bullying More at this moment. The role of Norfolk, stuck in the middle of the debate was sometimes effectively discussed, with responses noting that he is, in some senses, the audience's measure of fair play. Simpler responses often simply gave character studies of More, Cromwell, or both. The role of Cromwell as a Machiavellian self-server was often cited and sensibly analysed, thus enabling discussion of the exchange between him and the Jailer at the end of the scene.

Alan Ayckbourn: *Absurd Person Singular*

Question 5

- (a) Weaker answers here treated 'social difference' as social awkwardness and catalogued a series of moments where these difficulties are most acute in the play. Most answers were able to comment on the Hopcroft's (or perhaps Sidney's) social ambitions, but at times these discussions diverted themselves into analyses of the Hopcroft's marriage. More successful answers often talked about the three different settings for the play, about the preoccupations of the different pairs of characters. There was often useful discussion of how setting the action in the kitchens gives us 'off-stage' insights. At the top end, responses tussled with 'with what effects' and commented on the black comedy of the play's action. Most candidates were aware of the fluidity offered by the play and of the fact that the social differences change over the three years of the play's action.
- (b) The best answers to this question went way beyond character study. They were able to discuss various ways in which Ayckbourn shows Geoffrey's preoccupations and self-justifying self-obsession in this lengthy monologue. Geoffrey's use of questions and pauses was often cited, as was his ability to simply talk to himself while having the impression that he is communicating with Eva. There was often careful attention to the stage directions. Less successful responses tended to take a more narrative view in order to describe Geoffrey's situation at this point in the play.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/43
Drama

Key messages

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General comments

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Candidates who write a plan for their essays tend to do better. These responses have a firmer sense of direction, and in the case of **(b)** answers they are likely to take a more strategic view and avoid the line by line approach that often leads to a perfectly good range of points never really being synthesised into an effective argument.

At their best, responses were closely argued and intelligent, showing a close knowledge and understanding of both what is going on and of the author’s methods. Less successful responses often veered towards narrative, paraphrase or failed to engage fully with the particular terms of the question.

Comments on specific questions

Ama Ata Aidoo: *The Dilemma of a Ghost* and *Anowa*

Question 1

- (a)** Effective responses were able to cite a range of examples where the figures of the Old Man and the Old Woman are seen as moralisers but also as the guardians of oral history and custom; thus providing a context for society’s feelings and attitudes towards Anowa. The best answers were able to see them as both commentators and participants in the action of the play. Many useful interpretations responded to the ways in which the characters’ presence and commentary shapes an audience’s response to all of the characters and the cultural clashes presented.
- (b)** The role of the Bird of the Wayside was discussed with insight by most candidates. They were able to see that there is a framing device here, and that the bird offers us a pathway into the values and attitudes that will be presented subsequently. Responses were less secure on the ways in which this intervention sets up the tone of what is to follow by announcing the protagonists as in many ways symbolic or ‘type’ figures rather than naturalistic presentations of real people.

William Shakespeare: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Question 2

- (a) Restricted responses here tended towards suggesting that there is a binary opposition between the two worlds. More sophisticated answers were able to see that the worlds mirror each other and that the dramas of one (unattained love) are explicitly contrasted with the frustrations of Titania and Oberon's long-term relationship, even though it is plain that they too were fresh faced lovers once. There was much useful discussion of the contrasting values presented, with the rigidity of Athenian law set firmly in opposition to the freewheeling anarchy of the fairy world.
- (b) The question asked about contrasts, not simply about the events of the scene. The best answers responded by producing contrasts of language and by pointing out that the mechanicals' play acts as a parallel to, and parody of, much of what has gone on before. There was often interesting discussion of Quince's versification with the blank verse and prose spoken by other characters. Some answers pointed out, too, that we see Theseus here as a good ruler, wise and tolerant, and thus in a new light: he no longer directs the action. Some responses at the lower end used the passage as a springboard for a general discussion of contrasts in the play, quickly leaving behind any discussion of the detail of the printed passage.

William Shakespeare: *Antony and Cleopatra*

Question 3

- (a) All candidates showed knowledge of the range of suicides presented in the play. More confident responses were able to examine particular instances in detail. The focus was usually on Antony and Cleopatra's suicides (though the death of Enobarbas was mentioned by many), and there was often interesting discussion of Antony's incompetence or of the various ways in which Cleopatra stage manages her death in order to defeat Caesar and reveal him as an 'ass unpolicied.' The best answers tussled with the ways in which the two suicides present, ironically, a twist on Roman values and honour whilst also giving Shakespeare an opportunity to prolong and intensify the high tragedy of the play.
- (b) This was a very popular question on the paper as a whole. Candidates were well aware of the situation and tensions at this point in the play. The ambiguity of the scene was, however, harder to characterise – Antony and Cleopatra have fallen out and yet the attraction between them is as strong as ever. Answers often analysed this through discussion of Cleopatra's reliance on her women and her willingness to accept their advice about how to present herself. Similarly, Antony's repeated 'no' and his 'fie fie fie' and his weary 'Yet now – no matter' were often adduced as signalling the breach between them, repaired so movingly with 'Give me a kiss; even this repays me.'

Robert Bolt: *A Man for All Seasons*

Question 4

- (a) The question asked for contrasts and for 'dramatic effects.' At the highest levels, responses showed full engagement with the contrast of Cromwell's Machiavellian wheeling and dealing with More's steadfast adherence to his conscience and what he believes to be right. There was often substantial analysis of specific moments in the play when the two are put into direct conflict. Less detailed and subtle answers often simply thought of the two as representing a straightforward conflict between good and evil, with little recognition of the political situation or the external pressures on both men.
- (b) The fundamental presentation of "conflicting values" presented in the passage were well understood by virtually all candidates. Restricted responses took a few lines from the play and outlined the difference between More's inflexibility and Norfolk's pragmatism. Better responses were able to see that the conflict comes about in part because of More's affection for Norfolk and his desire not to involve the innocent in the fate he arguably foresees for himself.

Alan Ayckbourn: *Absurd Person Singular*

Question 5

- (a) A small number of very articulate and intelligent responses twisted the question by pointing out that in one sense, much of the action of the play takes place 'off-stage', thus allowing us to see what the characters are really like. Slightly less adventurous answers were able to consider the terrorising role of George, the dog, or the distant laughter of Dick and Lottie Potter. Sensitive answers pointed out that the off-stage characters often help us refine our understanding of the main characters and their motivations. A number of answers pointed out – and discussed with some skill – the fact that the passing of the two years between the three Christmases is the most significant aspect of the off-stage action, for it changes the dynamic between all the major characters.
- (b) Some answers focused mainly on Jane and Sidney and the awkwardness that is demonstrated between them. This, however, is not a true example of 'social tension,' and better responses were keen to observe that the Hopcrofts have gone from being a gauche couple who can be patronised, to people who very definitely (and explicitly at the end of the play) dictate the action. There was often useful discussion of the embarrassment of the Brewster-Wrights and the Jacksons, caught in the act of trying to avoid contact with the, by now, obnoxious Hopcrofts. The best answers were able to capture, both in terms of the action and the language, the acute tension in which everyone knows the truth of the situation, but even the thick-skinned Hopcrofts have to pretend that everything can be contained and exorcised through reassertion of social norms such as drinking and small talk.

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Key messages

- 1 Candidates choosing option **(b)** passage-based questions should ensure that they retain a focus most on discussing the details of the writing in the given passage.
- 2 Candidates should ensure that they are responding to all of the wording in the set question when planning their answers.

General comments

The general standard was satisfactory with nearly all candidates showing at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. This was the second session with the new rubric, which requires candidates to tackle at least one option **(b)** passage-based question. This change accounted for a small rise in the number of rubric errors, with candidates writing two option **(a)** discursive essays, a combination which is no longer permitted. The quality of expression was at least acceptable in nearly every case, although there are still some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level.

There were responses to all of the questions set and answers on each question were seen at each level of attainment. Some texts remain very popular – *Othello*, *Emma* and *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* – with others remaining very much minority choices, particularly Eliot and Rossetti, though the responses seen suggest these texts are very accessible to learners at all ability levels.

There are two specific issues to be addressed in this session:

1. Candidates answering option **(b)** passage-based questions must ensure that most of their answer is focused on the given passage. A number of candidates in this session used the passage as a means to write a more general option **(a)** essay, linked to the topic in the actual question. For example, *The Mill on the Floss* passage asked candidates to show 'what the passage contributes to your understanding of Maggie (Tulliver).' Less successful answers tended to write a general essay on Maggie's role and characterisation in the novel, with little attention given to the details of the passage and thereby, most importantly, the effects of Eliot's literary choices on the reader. Analysis of these elements is crucial if an answer to any passage question is to reach the higher levels of assessment.
2. Candidates should read the set question carefully and ensure that when planning their answer that all parts of the question are addressed. Some less successful answers tend to deal with only part of the question. The *Othello* **(a)** question for example, asked for a discussion of the presentation of Desdemona's relationships, which nearly every candidate had the textual knowledge to answer. However, the question went on to require consideration of the 'significance to the play's meaning and effects' of the presentation of these relationships. This part of the question was ignored by a significant number of answers, thus limiting the effectiveness of such answers against the assessment criteria and, as a consequence, their level of assessment and marks.

1. *Measure for Measure* – William Shakespeare

This was the minority Shakespeare text choice in this session.

- (a)** Nearly all candidates had sufficient knowledge of the text to explore different attitudes to justice. Most answers used at least three characters to explore the differences, most frequently examined were the Duke, Angelo and Isabella, with some answers considering how, in the context of this

play, 'justice' might be defined. Weaker answers tended to offer a simple list of characters, with little development of structure or argument evident. Some answers considered all characters to be at least ambiguous if not '*downright hypocritical*' in their attitudes to justice, with better answers often noting a gap between what is professed and what is actually performed. Other answers saw the differences in terms of gender or class, with many exploring the actions and speeches of Marianna and Pompey in detail. Candidates who saw the ambiguity in terms of the dramatic presentation and its effect on the audience often did very well.

- (b) Virtually every response recognised this as the main climax of the play, '*the much-anticipated reveal of the Friar's true identity*', as one put it. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the passage, often giving too much background context, such as the previous encounter between the Friar and Lucio. Better answers saw the dramatic tension of the situation, some through the mixing of the comic and the serious; others explored the ironies in Angelo's position and Lucio's choice in revealing the Duke and the Duke's 'comic' assertion of self-love. Those who managed the time well enough to consider the impact of Angelo's immediate confession were often able to bring in the play's wider concerns of justice, crime and punishment. Answers which explored the detail of the language and the action in terms of dramatic effects and the audience response often did very well.

2. *Othello*- William Shakespeare

This was the most popular text on the paper, with the majority of candidates responding to option (b).

- (a) Most candidates considered the relationships in turn, with nearly all focusing on Desdemona's relationships with her father, Othello, Cassio and Emilia. Weaker answers tended to summarise the history of each relationship in turn; better answers saw how each relationship was contrasted with another relationship, for example Desdemona as a daughter and as a wife. Successful answers often saw these relationships as the driving force of the play, though others saw them as '*simply the raw material of Iago's hellish plot*,' as one suggested. Answers which moved beyond character and plot into considering how the relationships are presented dramatically and through this considered 'significance' in terms of the play's meaning and effects often did very well.
- (b) This was the most popular question on the paper, with most candidates recognising this as the key moment in Iago's plot against Othello and Cassio. A few candidates were confused by Othello's role in the passage, but most recognised he was hidden from the onstage drama between Cassio and Bianca and that he was, in some way, assuming that Cassio was discussing Desdemona with Iago. Better answers were able to discuss the layers of dramatic tension, in terms of the contrasting emotions of Othello, Cassio and the audience. Some candidates considered Iago's ability to turn the surprise entrance of Bianca and, most notably, the handkerchief to his advantage, with many referring to him as '*the onstage director of proceedings, hurrying Cassio away so that he can pour more poison into Othello's ear*,' as one suggested. Other answers considered the importance of the handkerchief, the 'ocular proof' that Othello had earlier demanded, as a symbol of love and betrayal. Some saw the ambivalence of Othello's attitude to his wife and how Iago manipulates this so effectively that, as suggested: '*the audience know from this moment that there is no hope for Cassio or Desdemona*.' Those answers focusing on the detail of language and action to explore the dramatic tensions and how they informed the play's dramatic concerns often did very well.

3. *Emma*- Jane Austen

This was a very popular text this session with most candidates offering a response to the (b) question.

- (a) Social class and status were seen as key concerns in the text, with nearly all candidates able to discuss relevant examples and compare different characters' attitudes to them. Many focused on Emma herself, seeing the change in her attitudes as a fundamental tool used by Austen to signal Emma's growing maturity. Some answers saw the ambiguity of Emma's position, in elevating Harriet and yet scorning the Coles and Mr and Mrs Elton. A few suggested that as she increasingly adopts the views of Mr Knightley she becomes a true heroine. Successful answers explored how Austen used different characters to reveal her concerns, with some considering the contrasting comic and serious effects for example, created in the Box Hill episode. Others linked the discussion into attitudes towards marriage and wealth, often effectively juxtaposing Frank Churchill and Mr Elton, for example. Those answers which were able to explore how Austen presents such concerns and attitudes through her use of language and dialogue often did very well.

- (b) Nearly every answer recognised this as the aftermath of Elton's proposal of marriage. Weaker answers tended to narrate too much background to the passage at the expense of concentrating on the detail of the passage itself and often generalised about Emma's wider narrative. Many noted Emma's development here, often citing her concern for Harriet, though not for Elton, as evidence of her inner goodness. Those answers which concentrated on the details of Austen's writing did very well, often noting how the choices of language and punctuation, particularly the hyphen, enabled Austen to reveal Emma's developing awareness and recognition of her mistakes, though for some she was, arguably fairly, still tainted by her arrogance and self-justification, as revealed in the latter parts of the passage.

4. *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale- Geoffrey Chaucer*

This was the most popular text in Section B, with most candidates offering a response to the (b) question.

- (a) Nearly every candidate had at least a basic knowledge of the prologue and the tale and they were able to present some relevant points, though a minority of candidates discussed Alisoun as the Loathly Lady with no reference to the old woman in the tale. Weaker answers tended to give a summary of ways in which Alisoun was similar to and contrasted with the Loathly Lady, with many seeing the tale as a personal fantasy for the teller, in which her age and disappearing attractiveness were permanently reversed. Better answers explored how Chaucer revealed these connections through his choices of language and poetic techniques, with some seeing the interplay of humour and seriousness as a key element within his methods. Other good answers saw how his concerns such as 'maisterie', marriage, violence and fidelity were all developed through the role of the Loathly Lady and how, in these ways, he developed our understanding of the Wife of Bath herself.
- (b) Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the passage, offering intermittent commentary on what it revealed about Alisoun. Better answers saw the ways this passage developed the reader's understanding of Alisoun's (and for some thereby Chaucer's) views on marriage and husbands, with some noting '*the irony of the unnamed fourth husband's infidelity,*' as one put it. Others explored her characteristic homely imagery, interlaced with classical and biblical references, whereas others noted the use of digression and exemplars; many answers linking these elements effectively to the wider text. The way the Wife refers to her aging in the passage was picked up by a number of candidates, with some commenting on the contrast between her nostalgia over her youth and beauty compared to the light-hearted way in which she presents the death of her fourth husband. One candidate, for example, stated that, '*Her tone [over his death] does not show the same concern as when talking about her lost beauty*'. Linking to this, higher level answers were able to connect this nostalgia over her lost beauty to the rejuvenation of the old hag in the Tale. Good answers saw such methods and concerns as being part of Chaucer's wider scheme to undermine the female or authorities, depending on the candidate's interpretation.

5. *The Mill on the Floss- George Eliot*

This was a minority choice in this session, with candidates evenly split between options (a) and (b).

- (a) All candidates had a sufficient knowledge of the text to find relevant material to discuss. Better answers tended to select the material carefully in order to show different effects created by different relationships. Many answers focused on the Tullivers, especially Maggie and her relationships with her father and Tom; other answers also considered the Wakem family, in some cases contrasting the two father/ son pairings to good effect and how Eliot uses the tensions between them to develop the plot. Other good answers considered the relationships between the Tullivers and the Dodsons, for example, noting the comedy in the opposing attitudes to money. Answers which focused on Eliot's presentation, her use of dialogue and narrative techniques, often did very well.
- (b) Many answers saw this as a significant moment in Maggie's history, with weaker answers tending to provide a great deal of narrative background and too little focus on the detail of the passage. Better answers explored Eliot's development of character here, most notably Maggie, and how, in the midst of such temptations, her moral resolve is so carefully revealed. Some answers noted the irony of this in view of Tom's later accusations; whereas others saw the deepening tragic tone surrounding Maggie's hopes of happiness again. Other successful answers noted Eliot's use of language and tone to reveal the shifting emotions and the doubts of the lovers; others also noted her use of imagery, the currents for example, as a foreboding element. Answers which showed a

clear understanding of how this passage is significant to the reader's understanding of Maggie and how Eliot creates those effects in the reader often did very well.

6. *Great Expectations*- Charles Dickens

This was a popular choice, with most responses offering a response on question (b).

- (a) Nearly all answers were able to find relevant material to discuss. Weaker answers tended to tell the story of Pip and Biddy's relationship, often in great detail. More successful answers at this level saw how Dickens contrasted this relationship with others, such as Pip and Estella, with some contrasting the roles of Biddy and Estella in the development of the plot. Better answers also explored the relationship, taking Pip's comment into account, noting the development of the relationship and Pip's changing awareness of it and thereby of himself. The most successful answers saw this development in terms of Dickens's presentation, often focusing on the narrative voice and the use of language and imagery; answers which developed this into considering the effects of such choices on the reader often did very well.
- (b) All candidates recognised this as Pip's first meeting with Magwitch and had some awareness of its significance in the later development of the novel. Weaker answers tended to offer summaries of Pip's relationship with Magwitch, often moving too far away from the given passage, though some answers at this level had detailed, accurate knowledge of the text. Better answers focused on Dickens's literary choices such as language and imagery, often exploring how by these means the writer revealed differences in status, age and attitude between the characters. One response, for example, noted the 'comedic relief' that Dickens offers through the child-like view of the situation, referring to Pip's innocence in pointing to the gravestones when asked where his mother is; as one stated, '*This almost ridiculous misunderstanding lightens the atmosphere.*' Others saw hints of Pip's later development in his reactions and responses here and nearly all successful answers considered the significance of the specific details – the 'wittles' and the file for example – in terms of later developments in the novel, as well as the wider significance of this relationship to Pip's future 'great expectations'.

7. *Selected Poems*- John Keats

This was a popular text, with the vast majority of candidates responding to the (b) question.

- (a) The small number of candidates who tackled this question nearly always had a secure knowledge of the text and were able to select relevant poems to discuss. Weaker answers tended to summarise the poems in turn, often with limited ability to connect their ideas into a structured argument. Better answers explored beauty in a more thematic way, linking Keats's choices into the wider concerns, such as mortality, nature and human impermanence, often contrasting them with artistic longevity. Candidates who linked such discussions into a consideration of Keats's poetic choices such as language, imagery and versification often did very well.
- (b) Weaker candidates tended to paraphrase the given poem, sometimes taking a literal view of it, with some responses offering general comments on Keats's style, though rarely supported by reference to the detail of the extract. Better answers explored the extract in terms of Keats's characteristic concerns, with some making good links to other poems, such as the other 'Odes' or '*La Belle dame Sans Merci*'. Other answers considered the poetic techniques in detail, often showing thoughtful awareness of the effects of, for example, imagery and language, though few answers seemed confident in discussing metre and verse form. Very good answers were able to link such analyses into a consideration of the effects created, in the extract and in the wider text. However, few answers seemed confident in addressing the rest of the given poem and this limited the effectiveness of some discussions of the extract.

8. *Selected Poems*- Christina Rossetti

This was very much a minority choice in this session with few candidates responding to either option.

- (a) Nearly all candidates were able to find relevant poems to discuss, with weaker candidates tending to offer summaries of the poems, with some lapsing into more general paraphrasing. Better candidates invariably agreed with the statement and often chose a range of poems to cover a number of Rossetti's characteristic concerns, with good answers exploring both religious and secular poems. Candidates able to develop this discussion through consideration of Rossetti's

choices of poetic methods, especially when linked to awareness of the effects of those choices, often did very well.

- (b)** This was the more popular option. Nearly all candidates were able to respond to the poem relevantly. Weaker candidates tended to either paraphrase the poem, with occasional critical comments, or deal with the set poem in a cursory manner before moving onto the wider text. Better answers did focus on the effects of the writing, particularly language and imagery, though a few were able to explore verse form and the use of dialogue as well. Candidates who were able to link the detailed analysis of the set poem into a discussion of the wider text, with carefully selected examples, often did very well.

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The general standard was satisfactory with nearly all candidates showing at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. This was the second session with the new rubric, which requires candidates to tackle at least one option **(b)** passage-based question. This change accounted for a small rise in the number of rubric errors, with candidates writing two option **(a)** discursive essays, a combination which is no longer permitted. The quality of expression was at least acceptable in nearly every case, although there are still some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level.

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1. *Measure for Measure* – William Shakespeare

This was the minority Shakespeare text choice in this session.

- (a)** Nearly all candidates had sufficient knowledge of the text to explore different attitudes to justice. Most answers used at least three characters to explore the differences, most frequently examined were the Duke, Angelo and Isabella, with some answers considering how, in the context of this

play, 'justice' might be defined. Weaker answers tended to offer a simple list of characters, with little development of structure or argument evident. Some answers considered all characters to be at least ambiguous if not '*downright hypocritical*' in their attitudes to justice, with better answers often noting a gap between what is professed and what is actually performed. Other answers saw the differences in terms of gender or class, with many exploring the actions and speeches of Marianna and Pompey in detail. Candidates who saw the ambiguity in terms of the dramatic presentation and its effect on the audience often did very well.

- (b) Virtually every response recognised this as the main climax of the play, '*the much-anticipated reveal of the Friar's true identity*', as one put it. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the passage, often giving too much background context, such as the previous encounter between the Friar and Lucio. Better answers saw the dramatic tension of the situation, some through the mixing of the comic and the serious; others explored the ironies in Angelo's position and Lucio's choice in revealing the Duke and the Duke's 'comic' assertion of self-love. Those who managed the time well enough to consider the impact of Angelo's immediate confession were often able to bring in the play's wider concerns of justice, crime and punishment. Answers which explored the detail of the language and the action in terms of dramatic effects and the audience response often did very well.

2. *Othello*- William Shakespeare

This was the most popular text on the paper, with the majority of candidates responding to option (b).

- (a) Most candidates considered the relationships in turn, with nearly all focusing on Desdemona's relationships with her father, Othello, Cassio and Emilia. Weaker answers tended to summarise the history of each relationship in turn; better answers saw how each relationship was contrasted with another relationship, for example Desdemona as a daughter and as a wife. Successful answers often saw these relationships as the driving force of the play, though others saw them as '*simply the raw material of Iago's hellish plot*,' as one suggested. Answers which moved beyond character and plot into considering how the relationships are presented dramatically and through this considered 'significance' in terms of the play's meaning and effects often did very well.
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3. *Emma*- Jane Austen

This was a very popular text this session with most candidates offering a response to the (b) question.

- (a) Social class and status were seen as key concerns in the text, with nearly all candidates able to discuss relevant examples and compare different characters' attitudes to them. Many focused on Emma herself, seeing the change in her attitudes as a fundamental tool used by Austen to signal Emma's growing maturity. Some answers saw the ambiguity of Emma's position, in elevating Harriet and yet scorning the Coles and Mr and Mrs Elton. A few suggested that as she increasingly adopts the views of Mr Knightley she becomes a true heroine. Successful answers explored how Austen used different characters to reveal her concerns, with some considering the contrasting comic and serious effects for example, created in the Box Hill episode. Others linked the discussion into attitudes towards marriage and wealth, often effectively juxtaposing Frank Churchill and Mr Elton, for example. Those answers which were able to explore how Austen presents such concerns and attitudes through her use of language and dialogue often did very well.

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4. *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale- Geoffrey Chaucer*

This was the most popular text in Section B, with most candidates offering a response to the (b) question.

- (a) Nearly every candidate had at least a basic knowledge of the prologue and the tale and they were able to present some relevant points, though a minority of candidates discussed Alisoun as the Loathly Lady with no reference to the old woman in the tale. Weaker answers tended to give a summary of ways in which Alisoun was similar to and contrasted with the Loathly Lady, with many seeing the tale as a personal fantasy for the teller, in which her age and disappearing attractiveness were permanently reversed. Better answers explored how Chaucer revealed these connections through his choices of language and poetic techniques, with some seeing the interplay of humour and seriousness as a key element within his methods. Other good answers saw how his concerns such as 'maisterie', marriage, violence and fidelity were all developed through the role of the Loathly Lady and how, in these ways, he developed our understanding of the Wife of Bath herself.
- (b) Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the passage, offering intermittent commentary on what it revealed about Alisoun. Better answers saw the ways this passage developed the reader's understanding of Alisoun's (and for some thereby Chaucer's) views on marriage and husbands, with some noting '*the irony of the unnamed fourth husband's infidelity,*' as one put it. Others explored her characteristic homely imagery, interlaced with classical and biblical references, whereas others noted the use of digression and exemplars; many answers linking these elements effectively to the wider text. The way the Wife refers to her aging in the passage was picked up by a number of candidates, with some commenting on the contrast between her nostalgia over her youth and beauty compared to the light-hearted way in which she presents the death of her fourth husband. One candidate, for example, stated that, '*Her tone [over his death] does not show the same concern as when talking about her lost beauty*'. Linking to this, higher level answers were able to connect this nostalgia over her lost beauty to the rejuvenation of the old hag in the Tale. Good answers saw such methods and concerns as being part of Chaucer's wider scheme to undermine the female or authorities, depending on the candidate's interpretation.

5. *The Mill on the Floss- George Eliot*

This was a minority choice in this session, with candidates evenly split between options (a) and (b).

- (a) All candidates had a sufficient knowledge of the text to find relevant material to discuss. Better answers tended to select the material carefully in order to show different effects created by different relationships. Many answers focused on the Tullivers, especially Maggie and her relationships with her father and Tom; other answers also considered the Wakem family, in some cases contrasting the two father/ son pairings to good effect and how Eliot uses the tensions between them to develop the plot. Other good answers considered the relationships between the Tullivers and the Dodsons, for example, noting the comedy in the opposing attitudes to money. Answers which focused on Eliot's presentation, her use of dialogue and narrative techniques, often did very well.
- (b) Many answers saw this as a significant moment in Maggie's history, with weaker answers tending to provide a great deal of narrative background and too little focus on the detail of the passage. Better answers explored Eliot's development of character here, most notably Maggie, and how, in the midst of such temptations, her moral resolve is so carefully revealed. Some answers noted the irony of this in view of Tom's later accusations; whereas others saw the deepening tragic tone surrounding Maggie's hopes of happiness again. Other successful answers noted Eliot's use of language and tone to reveal the shifting emotions and the doubts of the lovers; others also noted her use of imagery, the currents for example, as a foreboding element. Answers which showed a

clear understanding of how this passage is significant to the reader's understanding of Maggie and how Eliot creates those effects in the reader often did very well.

6. *Great Expectations*- Charles Dickens

This was a popular choice, with most responses offering a response on question (b).

- (a) Nearly all answers were able to find relevant material to discuss. Weaker answers tended to tell the story of Pip and Biddy's relationship, often in great detail. More successful answers at this level saw how Dickens contrasted this relationship with others, such as Pip and Estella, with some contrasting the roles of Biddy and Estella in the development of the plot. Better answers also explored the relationship, taking Pip's comment into account, noting the development of the relationship and Pip's changing awareness of it and thereby of himself. The most successful answers saw this development in terms of Dickens's presentation, often focusing on the narrative voice and the use of language and imagery; answers which developed this into considering the effects of such choices on the reader often did very well.
- (b) All candidates recognised this as Pip's first meeting with Magwitch and had some awareness of its significance in the later development of the novel. Weaker answers tended to offer summaries of Pip's relationship with Magwitch, often moving too far away from the given passage, though some answers at this level had detailed, accurate knowledge of the text. Better answers focused on Dickens's literary choices such as language and imagery, often exploring how by these means the writer revealed differences in status, age and attitude between the characters. One response, for example, noted the 'comedic relief' that Dickens offers through the child-like view of the situation, referring to Pip's innocence in pointing to the gravestones when asked where his mother is; as one stated, '*This almost ridiculous misunderstanding lightens the atmosphere.*' Others saw hints of Pip's later development in his reactions and responses here and nearly all successful answers considered the significance of the specific details – the 'wittles' and the file for example – in terms of later developments in the novel, as well as the wider significance of this relationship to Pip's future 'great expectations'.

7. *Selected Poems*- John Keats

This was a popular text, with the vast majority of candidates responding to the (b) question.

- (a) The small number of candidates who tackled this question nearly always had a secure knowledge of the text and were able to select relevant poems to discuss. Weaker answers tended to summarise the poems in turn, often with limited ability to connect their ideas into a structured argument. Better answers explored beauty in a more thematic way, linking Keats's choices into the wider concerns, such as mortality, nature and human impermanence, often contrasting them with artistic longevity. Candidates who linked such discussions into a consideration of Keats's poetic choices such as language, imagery and versification often did very well.
- (b) Weaker candidates tended to paraphrase the given poem, sometimes taking a literal view of it, with some responses offering general comments on Keats's style, though rarely supported by reference to the detail of the extract. Better answers explored the extract in terms of Keats's characteristic concerns, with some making good links to other poems, such as the other 'Odes' or '*La Belle dame Sans Merci*'. Other answers considered the poetic techniques in detail, often showing thoughtful awareness of the effects of, for example, imagery and language, though few answers seemed confident in discussing metre and verse form. Very good answers were able to link such analyses into a consideration of the effects created, in the extract and in the wider text. However, few answers seemed confident in addressing the rest of the given poem and this limited the effectiveness of some discussions of the extract.

8. *Selected Poems*- Christina Rossetti

This was very much a minority choice in this session with few candidates responding to either option.

- (a) Nearly all candidates were able to find relevant poems to discuss, with weaker candidates tending to offer summaries of the poems, with some lapsing into more general paraphrasing. Better candidates invariably agreed with the statement and often chose a range of poems to cover a number of Rossetti's characteristic concerns, with good answers exploring both religious and secular poems. Candidates able to develop this discussion through consideration of Rossetti's

choices of poetic methods, especially when linked to awareness of the effects of those choices, often did very well.

- (b)** This was the more popular option. Nearly all candidates were able to respond to the poem relevantly. Weaker candidates tended to either paraphrase the poem, with occasional critical comments, or deal with the set poem in a cursory manner before moving onto the wider text. Better answers did focus on the effects of the writing, particularly language and imagery, though a few were able to explore verse form and the use of dialogue as well. Candidates who were able to link the detailed analysis of the set poem into a discussion of the wider text, with carefully selected examples, often did very well.

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- 2 Candidates should ensure that they are responding to all of the wording in the set question when planning their answers.

General comments

The general standard was satisfactory with nearly all candidates showing at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. This was the second session with the new rubric, which requires candidates to tackle at least one option **(b)** passage-based question. This change accounted for a small rise in the number of rubric errors, with candidates writing two option **(a)** discursive essays, a combination which is no longer permitted. The quality of expression was at least acceptable in nearly every case, although there are still some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level.

There were responses to all of the questions set and answers on each question were seen at each level of attainment. Some texts remain very popular – *Othello*, *Emma* and *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* – with others remaining very much minority choices, particularly Eliot and Rossetti, though the responses seen suggest these texts are very accessible to learners at all ability levels.

There are two specific issues to be addressed in this session:

1. Candidates answering option **(b)** passage-based questions must ensure that most of their answer is focused on the given passage. A number of candidates in this session used the passage as a means to write a more general option **(a)** essay, linked to the topic in the actual question. For example, *The Mill on the Floss* passage asked candidates to show 'what the passage contributes to your understanding of Maggie (Tulliver).' Less successful answers tended to write a general essay on Maggie's role and characterisation in the novel, with little attention given to the details of the passage and thereby, most importantly, the effects of Eliot's literary choices on the reader. Analysis of these elements is crucial if an answer to any passage question is to reach the higher levels of assessment.
2. Candidates should read the set question carefully and ensure that when planning their answer that all parts of the question are addressed. Some less successful answers tend to deal with only part of the question. The *Othello* **(a)** question for example asked for a discussion of the presentation of Desdemona's relationships, which nearly every candidate had the textual knowledge to answer. However the question went on to require consideration of the 'significance to the play's meaning and effects' of the presentation of these relationships. This part of the question was ignored by a significant number of answers, thus limiting the effectiveness of such answers against the assessment criteria and, as a consequence, their level of assessment and marks.

1. *Measure for Measure* – William Shakespeare

This was very much the minority Shakespeare text choice in this session with few answers seen on either option.

- (a)** Nearly all answers revealed a sound knowledge of the text, with most answers focusing on Angelo in response to the given quotation. Weaker answers tended to summarise what Angelo did in the play, often responding with engagement to his perceived hypocrisy. Better answers tended to use

three characters to highlight different attitudes to justice in the dramatic presentation: most often, the Duke, Angelo and Lucio, with the roles of Isabella and Escalus mentioned to counterbalance these, for some, more disturbing attitudes. Candidates who were able to make specific references to the detail of the play often did well: For example some explored how Angelo and Escalus respond differently to the trial of Pompey and Master Froth. Answers which focused on the dramatic presentation through considering Shakespeare's methods and their effects often did very well.

- (b) Nearly every response recognised the context for this passage and was able to give appropriate contexts in order to define its significance. Weaker answers tended to give too much narrative background and too little attention to the set passage. Better answers explored some of the dramatic effects, often noting the formality and grandeur of the Duke's return. For some the Duke was ambiguous- 'playing out his script', with many responses exploring the different layers of irony in the dialogue. Others thought the audience might be eagerly waiting for Angelo to get his comeuppance, often noticing the use of tension creating anticipation, here and elsewhere in the play. Candidates who also focused on the language and imagery, especially in Isabella's impassioned speeches and contrasted them with the Duke and Angelo's more 'dishonest' responses often did very well.

2. *Othello*- William Shakespeare

This was the most popular text this session with the majority of candidates responding to the option (b).

- (a) Nearly all candidates recognised the context for Brabantio's comment. Weaker answers went from this context into a more general summary of the opening to the play, leading to an often, detailed narrative account of Desdemona's relationship with her father and in some cases also with Othello. Better answers noted the specific wording of the task, the 'presentation of Desdemona' and developed their arguments to better address the wording of the question. For many answers Desdemona's relationship with Othello drives the plot and the action of the play from the start, coloured perhaps by this comment from Brabantio. Some developed this view to note the parallels between Desdemona's relationship with her father turning to mistrust and her relationship with Othello going the same way; but with nearly every answer recognised on some level, the significance of Iago. Some very good answers balanced her presentation through these relationships with a consideration of the language and imagery around her character, noting how the sensual descriptions of her from Othello and Iago were at odds with her own characteristic use of religious and more maidenly diction.
- (b) Most answers had a sound grasp of the context of this exchange, though weaker answers were unsure as to its precise location. Answers at this level also tended to summarise the full relationship between Othello and Iago, with a consequent lack of focus on the given passage. Better answers focused on what is revealed about the relationship here, often with a precise grasp of where this exchange fitted into the full arc of the relationship's development. The idea of 'honesty' was effectively explored, with some perceptive explorations of Iago's duplicitous nature, revealed for some through Othello's deeply ironic comments on Iago. Other good answers also explored the role of Cassio, often well considered as a 'go-between' and as providing the opportunity for Iago's developing plans. Good answers also noted Iago's use of questions, exploring the dramatic effects created, though for some, it was also 'defensive' – '*a route for retreat should his plans go astray,*' as one answer suggested.

3. *Emma*- Jane Austen

This was a popular text in this session, with most candidates offering a response to the (b) question.

- (a) Nearly all answers were able to discuss the quotation in the light of the given topic, recognising the underlying tensions and social concerns in Emma's comment. This led some candidates into discussing the Elton/Harriet 'relationship' in great detail, weaker answers providing a narrative summary and better answers linking the presentation into a discussion of Austen's wider concerns. Good answers were often alive to the ambiguities of the presentation of class and status, especially Emma's changing view of it, revealed in her attitudes to the Coles' party and in some good answers also contrasted with Knightley's view of the party. Some responses developed this idea more generally, ultimately and for some inevitably, leading to the alignment of Emma and Knightley in, for example, their view of Robert Martin. Better answers linked this into considering other significant events, such as the secret engagement of Frank and Jane, and other significant

concerns such as the role of family and marriage. Answers which developed these ideas through a consideration of Austen's methods and their effects on the reader did very well.

- (b) Nearly every response noted this as the first time the reader is introduced to Mr Knightley; this led weaker answers into recounting the full history of his involvement in the text, often with little detailed focus on the set passage. Better answers were able to explore his role and characterisation in this passage and then more widely in the text. Good answers focused on the methods of characterisation, exploring the use of free indirect discourse, the narrative voice and dialogue, sometimes noting the humour and the tone to good effect. Answers which were able to link such discussions into a consideration of Knightley's presentation more generally in the novel often did very well.

4. *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*- Geoffrey Chaucer

- (a) Nearly every candidate had at least a basic knowledge of the prologue and the tale and was able to present some relevant points, though a minority of candidates discussed Alisoun in great detail with only limited reference to the old woman in the tale. Weaker answers tended to give a summary of ways in which Alisoun was similar to and contrasted with the Loathly Lady, with many seeing the tale as a personal fantasy for the teller, in which her age and disappearing attractiveness were permanently reversed. Better answers explored how Chaucer revealed these connections through his choices of language and poetic techniques, with some seeing the interplay of humour and seriousness as a key element of his methods. Other good answers saw how his concerns such as 'maisterie', marriage, violence and fidelity were all developed through the role of the Loathly Lady and how, in these ways, Chaucer developed our understanding of the Wife of Bath herself.
- (b) Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the passage, offering intermittent comments on what it revealed about Alisoun. Better answers saw the ways this passage developed the reader's understanding of Alisoun's (and for some thereby Chaucer's) views on marriage and husbands, often noting the building of narrative tension in a way that is amusing and realistic. Better answers linked Jankyn's misogynistic attitudes to the other husbands, the Tale and Alisoun's '*protofeminist views on men and marriage*', as one answer suggested. For some, Alisoun was exactly what Jankyn is describing, supported by her actions and comments elsewhere in the Prologue. The violence here, disturbing and yet, for some, comic, was often linked to the rape in the Tale. This led into discussions of wider themes such as 'maisterie' and power. Some doubted the '*rapid change in Jankyn as absurd, as much wish fulfilment as the old hag turning into a young, beautiful woman,*' as one answer put it.

5. *The Mill on the Floss*- George Eliot

This was very much a minority choice in this session with few responses seen.

- (a) There were few answers to this question. Weaker answers tended to summarise Philip's narrative, concentrating on his doomed relationship with Maggie, though some answers did also explore his relationship with Tom and, less confidently, his father. Better answers discussed his role in the light of his comment, seeing him as a contrast to the focused and driven Tom, with a few answers extending this to comparing Philip's role with that of Stephen Guest. Answers which considered how Eliot presents Philip did well, especially when precise references were used to support the points made.
- (b) The very few candidates who answered this question had some grasp of the context and were able to offer a general commentary on its significance. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the given passage or offer a more general summary of the relationship between Maggie and Stephen in the wider text. Better answers focused on the detail of the passage and explored some of the effects created by Eliot's choices of diction, dialogue and narrative structures. Where this was linked to a discussion of the significance of the events here and to the wider text as a whole, the answers often did very well.

6. *Great Expectations*- Charles Dickens

Both questions on this text were popular in this session.

- (a) Nearly every candidate had a secure knowledge of the text and selected relevant material to discuss. Weaker answers tended to summarise the main events of the relationship, with some

answers also exploring the characterisation of Joe and Pip. Better answers focused on the significance in detail. Those who saw the novel as a bildungsroman often saw the role of Joe as father figure and a moral guardian for Pip. For others, he was a working-class symbol balancing Pip's misplaced desire to '*become a gentleman instead of the gentle man that Joe so clearly is,*' as one candidate suggested. Many responses discussed the role of Biddy as well, often developing a good argument in linking the growth of her relationship with Joe to Pip's own moral growth. Answers which focused on the detail of the text, exploring how Dickens shapes the narrative through Pip's first person narration for example, often did well, especially when this was linked to the effects on the reader.

- (b) Nearly every answer gave a detailed context to the passage, recognising it as a key climax in the text. Weaker answers tended to either paraphrase the passage, with some limited comments, or summarise the on-going relationship between Pip and Magwitch. For some the revelation of Magwitch as Pip's true benefactor surprises the reader, with the effect of the writing originally coming in instalments often noted by many. Better answers analysed Dickens's methods, for example the use of dialogue and rhetorical questions. Others observed parallels between this and the opening chapter: the emphasis on Magwitch carefully watching Pip, for example, and how Pip's '*personal space is invaded, with the result that Pip struggles to speak,*' as one suggested. Other very good answers explored the drama and for some the 'dramatic' effects that Dickens creates in his use of action, tone and dialogue.

7. Selected Poems- John Keats

This was a popular text with the majority of candidates responding to the (b) question.

- (a) Nearly every answer found relevant material to discuss, with many focusing on Keats's presentation of human relationships, as well as relationships with nature, art and poetry itself. Weaker answers tended to summarise more or less relevant poems with some occasional insights into Keats's poetic choices. Better answers were able to explore some of the dualities in Keats's poetry, for example: '*the paradoxical quality of ecstasy in human relationships and its capacity to destroy,*' as one candidate suggested of '*La Belle Dame sans Merci,*' '*Hush Hush!..*' and '*The Eve of St Agnes*'. Others saw relationships more metaphorically, exploring light and dark, for example, or pleasure and pain, life and death, as well as humans and nature. Answers which explored how Keats presents these relationships by his poetic choices and, importantly, their effects often did very well.
- (b) Candidates nearly all had a secure knowledge of the poem. Weaker answers were able to offer a solid paraphrase with some awareness of poetic choices often suggested. Better answers explored Keats's characteristic themes, such as mortality, time and inevitably nature, often referencing the other great Odes and '*The Eve of St Agnes*'. Successful answers focused on the detail of Keats's poetic choices, often developing perceptive analyses of language and imagery, though less often considering poetic form and structure. Candidates who developed such arguments by considering the effects of Keats's poetic choices on the reader often did very well.

8. Selected Poems- Christina Rossetti

This was a minority choice in this session with few responses seen.

- (a) Nearly every answer found relevant material to discuss. Weaker answers tended to summarise more or less relevant poems, with some awareness of Rossetti's poetic choices. Better answers tended to consider the view presented: 'Her poetry presents lessons drawn from everyday situations and stories' as unfounded and offered evidence from such poems as '*At Home*', '*Remember*' and '*Shut Out*'. Some however, agreed with the view and saw '*Goblin Market*' as partly true of it – sisters acting together to resist temptation and protecting/helping each other in times of trouble. For other responses, the poems were often magical and fantastical, indicated by Rossetti's use of the ballad form, for example. Responses which supported such arguments by close reference to Rossetti's poetic methods, and crucially their effects, often did very well.
- (b) This was very much a minority choice. Weaker answers offered a more or less accurate paraphrase, with some answers focusing on the biographical context rather than the detail of the set poem. Better answers explored some of Rossetti's characteristic themes such as the rejection of earthly love for spiritual love and the duality of man/woman's existence. Other answers explored her emotional concerns such as love, loss, regret and sorrow, with better answers linking these

concerns into the wider text with appropriate quotations. One answer for example linked the poem to '*Goblin Market*' with one sister giving in to temptation and one staying strong. Some also explored how this idea was developed in '*The Covent Threshold*', by theme and tone. Very good answers offered perceptive analysis of Rossetti's poetic choices, particularly expression and imagery, though only a few answers considered poetic form and structure in sufficient detail.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/61
1900 to the Present

Key messages

To raise levels of achievement candidates answering **(a)** questions should support their ideas with more detailed references to the text and some pertinent quotations.

Candidates answering **(b)** questions need to focus in much more detail on 'the effects of the writing' in the passages and use references to the wider text or broader concerns to inform this discussion.

Candidates who take the time to quickly plan out an answer to the question tend to do better because the exercise encourages them to deconstruct the question, think of a range of ideas in response to it, as well as identifying specific bits of evidence to illustrate some deeper understanding of methods.

General comments

The paper was comparable in difficulty with those of other sessions and all questions were accessible. There was some enthusiastic take up of the newer novels '*Americanah*' and '*The White Tiger*', but all of the texts seemed to stimulate some lively engagement with the writers' concerns and in many cases a sophisticated appreciation of ways in which writers shape a reader's response. The most impressive scripts offered detailed analysis and substantive textual and contextual knowledge; using a range of apt literary and linguistic devices to display a skilful appreciation of the texts as literature rather than social documentaries. There was also evidence of wider critical reading being effectively linked to textual detail and used to present alternative opinions or support a case. There were however, a large number of scripts on the borderline between levels 2 and 3, or levels 3 and 4 who, despite the fact that they could often express themselves fluently and, indeed generated coherent, intelligent arguments in response to the **(a)** questions; nevertheless achieved only modest marks because of lack of attention to detail. Potentially effective arguments were too frequently supported by brief, generalised references to the plot or a writer's concerns and many candidates writing on the plays or short stories offered no textual references to specific scenes or what characters said or thought at all. Some candidates, aware perhaps of their lack of detailed knowledge, ignored the instructions in some questions to refer to 'two short stories' or two or three poems. These restrictions are there to encourage candidates to look in-depth at how a writer or poet presents ideas by offering opportunities for comparison and contrast; no additional marks are awarded for short narrative summaries of a larger number of stories or poems. It is helpful for candidates to study and revise short stories and poems in pairs and, as with all the texts, select and learn some pertinent quotations which can be used not only to support opinions about themes or characters, but analysed to show understanding of a range of methods and effects. Similarly, candidates with modest marks who chose the **(b)** questions needed to pay more attention to the 'effects of the writing' in the passages and show evidence of an ability to do some close reading and analysis. It is sometimes helpful to offer immediate textual, literary, historical, philosophical or cultural contexts, but not as overlong generalised introductions. This material together with detailed references to the wider texts needs to be carefully balanced and integrated into a more systematic discussion of the writers' presentation of ideas, characters or feelings in the given passage or poem, through their choice of language and control of rhythm and tone.

The best scripts often showed evidence of a plan and some consideration of the terms of the question. For example they looked at the instructive phrases like 'By what means and with what effects' and quickly listed aspects of methods which were then dealt with in more detail in the main body of the essay. They made apt use of a critical vocabulary such as 'point of view', 'persona', 'stream of consciousness', 'imagery' and 'symbolism'. Less consideration was given to diction, tone and sound effects of language and the impact of sentence structure or juxtaposition, but effective essays looked at the different ways irony, empathy and pathos are generated. Confident use of such terms helps candidates to develop their ideas with more

precision and depth and usually enhances their appreciation of the texts as literature. Weaker candidates tend to be cavalier about the genre of their texts, referring to plays as novels and not surprisingly, finding it difficult to see the texts or extracts in dramatic terms. Many basic summaries of dramatic extracts would be improved by more frequent consideration of the possible effects on the audience of particular words or actions in the interactions between characters. The concept of 'stichomythia' – the rapid exchange of short lines between different characters – is useful to explore the structure and effects created in dramatic dialogue. Candidates continue to find the poetry texts and aspects of poetic form rather challenging. Less accomplished scripts relied on textual summary and received opinions to direct the course of discussions, but there were some sensitive readings and appreciations of aspects of poetic methods. Candidates choosing the **(b)** question should be reminded to include some relevant references to the wider text and advised against doing the given poem if it is less familiar or as an unseen.

Successful candidates had enough detailed knowledge of the texts to write two fairly equal, substantial essays. Most candidates were able to express themselves clearly with only occasional lapses in fluency, though a few in the lower levels were restricted to the expression of simple ideas which impeded their communication of literary understanding. There were very few rubric errors, though one candidate offered two Mansfield stories which are not on the set list and another offered two questions on the same text. Some candidates seem to find it hard to decide whether to do the **(a)** or **(b)** question, and begin one then drift into the other, or artfully do not designate which question they are doing and leave the Examiner to decide which would allow for a higher mark. This is not a good strategy. Generally speaking success comes to those who throughout their course make strategic use of the mark scheme in planning their answers and have lots of practice in close reading and analysing short snippets from the texts. These exercises provide detailed material for **(a)** questions and transferable skills, as well as specific references to the wider text for those opting for the **(b)** questions. A clear understanding of the content will only get candidates into the lower levels and to be more successful they need to display an ability to select and analyse significant details – particularly of language to deepen their discussion of ideas and appreciation of effects.

Comments on specific questions

1. CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE: *Americanah*

There was significant take up of this new, substantial novel. Most candidates communicated a lively personal engagement with the writer's concerns with many showing good recall of significant events and narrative details.

- (a)** This was the more popular option and while many adopted a rather narrative approach to show an understanding of what the experience of being an immigrant was like, most were able to select a range of characters and plot details that supported some brief comments on racial discrimination, humiliation, alienation and assumed identity with some reflections on the plight of migrant workers. The best scripts considered the terms of the question: 'By what means and with what effects...' and discussed the effects of the structure – the parallel stories of Ifemelu and Obinze with points of comparison and contrast between their experiences and their observations of other characters. Most attempted to consider how issues of identity were explored through the use of hair or accent, or through personal relationships. More successful essays had lots of detailed specific references with pertinent quotations available to illustrate how the characters felt about aspects of their experiences. The analysis of some significant details and the language helped to develop a more literary personal response. Surprisingly, only a few mentioned Ifemelu's blog – usually to superficially assert that the voice and the views are Adichie's own. Very few had quotations to show how the blog is used to develop Ifemelu's character and how the opportunities for self-expression and validation enabled the character to reclaim and assert an identity for herself. Others however, did consider how the experience of being an immigrant affected Ifemelu on her return to Nigeria. Less successful answers sometimes seemed to be trying to adapt pre-prepared essays on identity or racism often confined to Ifemelu's experience in America; or made a few sensible points but were thin on textual detail.
- (b)** There were a few essays which effectively located the context of this passage and made some relevant links to the broader textual concerns, pointing out how the use of 'American black' characters here widens the perspective on racism. Some teased out the complexity of the interactions here. The best of these showed some insight into the presentation of Shan as a character and caught a sense of Ifemelu's ambivalent response to her. There was rather less consideration of the effects of Adichie's use of colloquial diction and sentence structures in Shan's anecdotes, in comparison to the usual use of a third persona narrator closely allied to Ifemelu's

viewpoint. Some noticed this in Ifemelu's reaction to Ashanti but few candidates were prepared to look in detail at some of the ways in which Adichie exposes the social reality and alienation of American black people in society. Just occasionally some would comment on the choice of language used to describe Mariabelle and Joan, such as the use of 'costume' for example but in that paragraph there were lots of opportunities to discuss how Adichie uses repetition and sentence structure to generate a critical, sarcastic tone. Many essays were unbalanced, either with some narrative focusing on racism and discrimination in the wider text, or restricted to narrative commentaries of the passage itself. Most of these stayed on the surface of the text, restricting comments to obvious details such as 'race is a brew served mild' and expressing outrage at Peter's comment: 'His wife must feel worse knowing you are black.' The tendency is to note the presence of these details rather than to explore how the thoughts and feelings in the passage are communicated. Few candidates took the opportunity to consider the contribution of such words as 'parody' or 'subtle' to the effects of the writing and the wider concerns of inter-racial, multi-cultural social relations. The weakest answers showed insecure knowledge about the situation and characters and struggled to paraphrase the passage.

2. ARAVIND ADIGA: *The White Tiger*

This new text is also becoming quite popular, with candidates obviously enjoying the social and political satire. The challenge for candidates is to fully appreciate the humour and charm of the narrator's unreliable 'voice' and to generate a literary response. Both questions produced answers across the range, with the (a) question proving to be the more popular and, on the whole, better done by more candidates.

- (a) The most sophisticated responses made good use of the quotation in the question to structure their essays. They used the issue of being a 'man' as a way of selecting material from Balram's childhood and experience of being a servant and discussed the extent to which a reader is seduced into seeing the world from the narrator's point of view. The best answers showed some appreciation of the effects of the lively narrative style and structure. More modest answers argued a vigorous response to the character, making relevant use of specific references and commenting on the symbolic impact of the Rooster Coop and white tiger imagery. The weakest efforts saw the question as an invitation to justify or condemn Balram's action in moral rather than literary terms, with slightly better ones suggesting that the murder was pardonable because it was a product of the corrupt society rather than a man. Some remarked on how Balram's act also involves the indirect murder of his own family, which was excused on the basis of their treatment of him and the suggestion that the setting up of his business and actions as an employer represent a better world than the one the murder displaced. The question stimulated some lively writing with some consideration of alternative opinions shaped into a vigorous, coherent argument.
- (b) This was an accessible passage. Many candidates related to it on a straightforward level showing a clear understanding of the context and content. Those candidates who balanced a close reading of the given text with some discussion of what was 'characteristic' about Balram's voice as a narrator and commentator did well. They considered the provocative impact of phrases such as 'Innocent servants' pleasures' or Balram's views on the 'point of [Ashok's] living'. A few were suspicious of clichéd phrases such as 'my heart just had to melt' and 'I forgave him entirely'. Most felt that the subdued aggression here anticipated Balram's murder of his master and some noted how the relationship was mirrored in the action and the syntax – for example in Ashok saying: 'Drive me ... Anywhere you want', preparing the reader for the inversion of power that is to follow. More modest answers sometimes related the passage to the general topic of master-servant relationships; Balram's experience of this prior to this event and explained the reference to Pinky Madam's hit-and-run incident. Others linked the whisky bottle to the murder scene. Some restricted their discussion solely to the passage and using a running commentary approach, often close to paraphrase, summarised the relationship with some clear understanding of Balram's thoughts and feelings. Weaker responses completely missed the tone and thought that the passage presented Balram in a favourable light, or overinvested in such issues as alcohol abuse, caste, and the extent to which Balram was religious.

3. ATHOL FUGARD: *My Children! My Africa!* and *The Road to Mecca*

This continues to be a popular text in this component but one with which candidates have only modest success because the majority of candidates do not show adequate detailed knowledge of the plays.

- (a) A few essays considered the terms of the question: what the characters' visions might be and how they might be considered dangerous to others and to themselves. These considerations helped to

structure and develop meaningful comparisons and contrasts. Most were slightly better prepared to discuss Mr M's role as teacher and belief in education as a means of liberation in Apartheid South Africa, and how this brought him into conflict with Thami and the brotherhood on the streets of the location. Fewer were able to explore the significance of Helen's works of art for her own self-expression and validation, and by extension how the creative arts challenge a repressive political society. Most rather generally noted that the religious connotations of Mecca threatened the orthodox pieties of the Afrikaans community. One or two answers considered their roles as 'hero' figures in relation to the outcomes of the plays, as tragic or personally assertive, though some thought that Helen would commit or did commit suicide at the end of the play. Many clearly saw aspects of these issues and sometimes constructed intelligent, fluent arguments but discussion stayed on a rather generalised level with very few specific references to particular scenes. A few mentioned the dramatic impact and symbolism of the ringing of the bell in 'My Children! My Africa!' or the lighted candles in 'The Road to Mecca' and were able to comment on the dramatic irony of these in relation to the idea of personal danger. Many candidates however, did not show any appreciation of the texts as plays because there were no references to the interactions between characters such as Mr M's confrontation with Thami, or Marius's with Helen or Elsa, and no use was made of quotations from the long speeches in which these characters explain themselves.

- (b) This was the more popular option and generally better done by more candidates. The best answers were able to contextualise the extract with broader themes such as the difficulties of inter-racial relationships at this time, or conflict within friendship. Fewer discussed the cultural and political significance of the 'Literary Quiz' though some explained the implications of Thami's withdrawal from it in terms of Mr M's aspirations. Most focused in some detail on the shifting tones of the conversation and what this showed about the characters and their relationship. They focused on Thami's insistence that 'It is not about you and me personally' and Isabel's desperation to show she is also on an inner journey to match Thami's own. Many commented on the use of ellipsis, dashes, questions and exclamations to discuss the emotional effects of the writing. A few candidates showed an understanding of how dialogue works by picking up on the placement and impact of such phrases as 'I have had a good time with you, Isobel/ And I have had an important one with you.' Some noticed how Isabel's verbosity is juxtaposed with Thami's stonewalling, how his increasingly short utterances sound more and more threatening until Isabel's use of the euphemistic 'unrest' is countered by his emphatic use of pronouns and the exclusionary term '*Isiqualo*'. Less effective essays spent too much time giving information about their class and racial differences, in explaining the context of the competition and the political situation, though this sometimes allowed them to at least relate the extract to the whole. Others resorted to running commentaries that were very close to paraphrases of the extract.

4. LIZ LOCHHEAD: *A Choosing*

There were very few takers on this component for this text.

- (a) Very few chose this option. The question was open, inviting candidates to select three poems which dealt with either what appear to be very personal experiences, such as relationships with family or lovers, or memories or to think about more obviously social concerns such as gender issues and stereotypes. Candidates tended to offer a summary of their chosen poems with some biographical information or notes on Lochhead's views on feminism or her role as Makar. While candidates showed some clear basic understanding of the ideas in the poems, success was limited because little attention was paid to Lochhead's methods and effects. There were some general remarks about the colloquial language and humour but very few quotations available for analysis.
- (b) There were a few responses, but the insecure understanding and limited appreciation of form and language together with lack of reference to other poems suggested that most candidates were doing this poem as an unseen. There were however, a few informed discussions which considered the effect of making the poem the persona in the poem and effectively explored how the feelings of vulnerability were presented. Some made a connection between a visit to a prison and the sonnet form and referred to other poems such as "*Epithalamium*" and "*Poets Need Not*". Most found some detail of language to discuss: the more obvious sound effects in 'Brute clang of steel doors, bars, barbed wire, fear,' the use of Scots words and accents for the inmates and other examples of her colloquial style. There were also some intelligent, sensitive discussions of the significance of particular language choices such as the impact of 'in all innocence', the irony of 'this is oor choice' or particular phrases like 'Time that must be done/Not lived...' Weaker essays attempted to extract meaning by paraphrasing the poem and stayed on the surface of the text.

5. KATHERINE MANSFIELD: *Selected Stories*

This continues to be a popular choice of text. Both questions produced answers across the range with the lack of detailed knowledge proving an issue on both questions, as was the overinvestment in biographical information. The **(b)** question was the more popular option.

- (a)** The best scripts considered the terms of the question and chose stories which offered more opportunities for discussing both the nature of the rebellion and how Mansfield presents it. The most productive pairing was 'The Garden Party' and 'The Doll's House' which looked at the use of children as a means of challenging not just ideas about class, but the human experience of it; supported by useful quotations and some understanding of Mansfield's use of symbols. Sometimes one of these stories was effectively linked with 'The Wind' and there was an interesting essay looking at rebellion against the role of wife and mother linking Linda in 'Prelude' with Mrs Kember in 'At the Bay'. A few attempted to deal with male figures who challenge social stereotypes or expectations with varying success. More modest essays showed some awareness of the narrative style and angle of vision and where candidates were able to make some specific references to textual details this allowed them to make some analytical comments. The responses of the majority of the candidates particularly those who tried to use 'Millie', 'Bliss' and 'The Woman at the Store', were restricted, they seemed to be relying on plot summaries and used a narrative approach with basic descriptions or explanations of characters and, in the case of 'Bliss' were often dependent on biographical details of Mansfield's bisexuality. In some cases candidates cast their net too widely by referring superficially to several stories often to write more generally about gender roles. A small minority seemed to either misunderstand the word 'rebel' or were determined to use less obviously appropriate stories like 'Feuille d'Album' just because they knew of them.
- (b)** This question was often well done by candidates whose references to the wider story enabled them to explore class through some detailed analysis of Laura's interactions with the workmen and other members of her family in the earlier part of the story; while at the same time, sensitively appreciating how Mansfield creates Laura's uncomfortable experience in the passage. There were some detailed references to symbolic settings such as the gardens and kitchens, light and dark, and the use of the 'hat', as well as comments on the working class sociolects and deference with some candidates picking up on how threatened Laura felt through the use of such words as 'queerly', 'oily' and 'sly'. The best essays systematically explored the impact of the language: the way the syntax conveys Laura's acute self-consciousness through: 'to be covered up in anything, one of those women's shawls even' and the effects and implications of the description of the corpse. Confident candidates discussed the ambiguity of the ending in detail, as well as referring to similar endings of other stories as a 'characteristic.' There was also some relevant linking through the use of children and the issues of class to 'The Doll's House'. More modest essays focused rather narrowly on the class issues, or talked rather generally of 'stream of consciousness' and 'epiphany' without showing what it was, or how it was relevant to this story. Some weaker essays showed insecure knowledge of the wider story or none at all, and did not know what to make of Laura's vision of the dead man, offering personal religious views; many ignored the ending completely.

6. ARTHUR MILLER: *Death of a Salesman*

This was by far the most popular text with candidates relishing the contemporary relevance of the pressure to be successful and the impact on family relationships. Some made use of critical reading though in many cases this was limited to very general ideas about The American Dream which, unsupported by references to the text were either distractions, or so brief as to be unhelpful. The **(b)** question was slightly more popular but both produced answers across the range.

- (a)** Most candidates could clearly identify moments of emotional and psychological instability in Willy with the discriminating factor being the extent to which they could probe the methods of presentation and significance. Some candidates were well-versed in time shifts and flashbacks but seemed to think 'states of mind' could be limited to the presence of the past in the present. Better essays focused on how Miller uses dramatic strategies such as the set, the convention of walking through invisible walls, the flute music, laughter and time shifts to show how they are used to bring out the themes of Willy's mental crisis. These were used to demonstrate an awareness of Willy's present failure as a salesman and his guilt in relation to The Woman, triggered by Linda's darning of stockings; his exaggerated sense of his own success and Biff's potential in the flashbacks and his conversations with the deceased Ben, most notably in the card playing scene with Charley. Some essays were clear in outline and could explain aspects of the character and the dramatic

methods but did so generally with limited textual reference, tending to focus on the suicide attempts and one instance where Willy contradicts himself within a few lines – on the subject of Biff's laziness for example. Others tended to be more straightforwardly narrative, summarising the plot so that while they could hardly fail to allude to Willy's varying 'states of mind', they showed limited understanding of dramatic significance and effects. A few candidates tended to drift away from the focus of the question and discuss prepared material on Willy's relationships with his wife and sons or the issue of having the wrong dreams and values.

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7. W B YEATS: *Selected Poems*

This is a minority text which is often done well by candidates who are well informed about the context and Yeats's concerns and for whom detailed study brings an appreciation of the intricacies of his poetic methods and effects. The (b) option was the more popular but less well done as the majority of candidates choosing it seemed to be approaching it as an unseen.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/62
1900 to the Present

Key messages

To raise levels of achievement candidates answering **(a)** questions should support their ideas with more detailed references to the text and some pertinent quotations.

Candidates answering **(b)** questions need to focus in much more detail on 'the effects of the writing' in the passages and use references to the wider text or broader concerns to inform this discussion.

Candidates who take the time to quickly plan out an answer to the question tend to do better because the exercise encourages them to deconstruct the question, think of a range of ideas in response to it, as well as identifying specific bits of evidence to illustrate some deeper understanding of methods.

General comments

The paper was comparable in difficulty with those of other sessions and all questions were accessible. There was some enthusiastic take up of the newer novels '*Americanah*' and '*The White Tiger*', but all of the texts seemed to stimulate some lively engagement with the writers' concerns and in many cases a sophisticated appreciation of ways in which writers shape a reader's response. The most impressive scripts offered detailed analysis and substantive textual and contextual knowledge; using a range of apt literary and linguistic devices to display a skilful appreciation of the texts as literature rather than social documentaries. There was also evidence of wider critical reading being effectively linked to textual detail and used to present alternative opinions or support a case. There were however, a large number of scripts on the borderline between levels 2 and 3, or levels 3 and 4 who, despite the fact that they could often express themselves fluently and, indeed generated coherent, intelligent arguments in response to the **(a)** questions; nevertheless achieved only modest marks because of lack of attention to detail. Potentially effective arguments were too frequently supported by brief, generalised references to the plot or a writer's concerns and many candidates writing on the plays or short stories offered no textual references to specific scenes or what characters said or thought at all. Some candidates, aware perhaps of their lack of detailed knowledge, ignored the instructions in some questions to refer to 'two short stories' or two or three poems. These restrictions are there to encourage candidates to look in-depth at how a writer or poet presents ideas by offering opportunities for comparison and contrast; no additional marks are awarded for short narrative summaries of a larger number of stories or poems. It is helpful for candidates to study and revise short stories and poems in pairs and, as with all the texts, select and learn some pertinent quotations which can be used not only to support opinions about themes or characters, but analysed to show understanding of a range of methods and effects. Similarly, candidates with modest marks who chose the **(b)** questions needed to pay more attention to the 'effects of the writing' in the passages and show evidence of an ability to do some close reading and analysis. It is sometimes helpful to offer immediate textual, literary, historical, philosophical or cultural contexts, but not as overlong generalised introductions. This material together with detailed references to the wider texts needs to be carefully balanced and integrated into a more systematic discussion of the writers' presentation of ideas, characters or feelings in the given passage or poem, through their choice of language and control of rhythm and tone.

The best scripts often showed evidence of a plan and some consideration of the terms of the question. For example they looked at the instructive phrases like 'By what means and with what effects' and quickly listed aspects of methods which were then dealt with in more detail in the main body of the essay. They made apt use of a critical vocabulary such as 'point of view', 'persona', 'stream of consciousness', 'imagery' and 'symbolism'. Less consideration was given to diction, tone and sound effects of language and the impact of sentence structure or juxtaposition, but effective essays looked at the different ways irony, empathy and pathos are generated. Confident use of such terms helps candidates to develop their ideas with more

precision and depth and usually enhances their appreciation of the texts as literature. Weaker candidates tend to be cavalier about the genre of their texts, referring to plays as novels and not surprisingly, finding it difficult to see the texts or extracts in dramatic terms. Many basic summaries of dramatic extracts would be improved by more frequent consideration of the possible effects on the audience of particular words or actions in the interactions between characters. The concept of 'stichomythia' – the rapid exchange of short lines between different characters – is useful to explore the structure and effects created in dramatic dialogue. Candidates continue to find the poetry texts and aspects of poetic form rather challenging. Less accomplished scripts relied on textual summary and received opinions to direct the course of discussions, but there were some sensitive readings and appreciations of aspects of poetic methods. Candidates choosing the **(b)** question should be reminded to include some relevant references to the wider text and advised against doing the given poem if it is less familiar or as an unseen.

Successful candidates had enough detailed knowledge of the texts to write two fairly equal, substantial essays. Most candidates were able to express themselves clearly with only occasional lapses in fluency, though a few in the lower levels were restricted to the expression of simple ideas which impeded their communication of literary understanding. There were very few rubric errors, though one candidate offered two Mansfield stories which are not on the set list and another offered two questions on the same text. Some candidates seem to find it hard to decide whether to do the **(a)** or **(b)** question, and begin one then drift into the other, or artfully do not designate which question they are doing and leave the Examiner to decide which would allow for a higher mark. This is not a good strategy. Generally speaking success comes to those who throughout their course make strategic use of the mark scheme in planning their answers and have lots of practice in close reading and analysing short snippets from the texts. These exercises provide detailed material for **(a)** questions and transferable skills, as well as specific references to the wider text for those opting for the **(b)** questions. A clear understanding of the content will only get candidates into the lower levels and to be more successful they need to display an ability to select and analyse significant details – particularly of language to deepen their discussion of ideas and appreciation of effects.

Comments on specific questions

1. CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE: *Americanah*

There was significant take up of this new, substantial novel. Most candidates communicated a lively personal engagement with the writer's concerns with many showing good recall of significant events and narrative details.

- (a)** This was the more popular option and while many adopted a rather narrative approach to show an understanding of what the experience of being an immigrant was like, most were able to select a range of characters and plot details that supported some brief comments on racial discrimination, humiliation, alienation and assumed identity with some reflections on the plight of migrant workers. The best scripts considered the terms of the question: 'By what means and with what effects...' and discussed the effects of the structure – the parallel stories of Ifemelu and Obinze with points of comparison and contrast between their experiences and their observations of other characters. Most attempted to consider how issues of identity were explored through the use of hair or accent, or through personal relationships. More successful essays had lots of detailed specific references with pertinent quotations available to illustrate how the characters felt about aspects of their experiences. The analysis of some significant details and the language helped to develop a more literary personal response. Surprisingly, only a few mentioned Ifemelu's blog – usually to superficially assert that the voice and the views are Adichie's own. Very few had quotations to show how the blog is used to develop Ifemelu's character and how the opportunities for self-expression and validation enabled the character to reclaim and assert an identity for herself. Others however, did consider how the experience of being an immigrant affected Ifemelu on her return to Nigeria. Less successful answers sometimes seemed to be trying to adapt pre-prepared essays on identity or racism often confined to Ifemelu's experience in America; or made a few sensible points but were thin on textual detail.
- (b)** There were a few essays which effectively located the context of this passage and made some relevant links to the broader textual concerns, pointing out how the use of 'American black' characters here widens the perspective on racism. Some teased out the complexity of the interactions here. The best of these showed some insight into the presentation of Shan as a character and caught a sense of Ifemelu's ambivalent response to her. There was rather less consideration of the effects of Adichie's use of colloquial diction and sentence structures in Shan's anecdotes, in comparison to the usual use of a third persona narrator closely allied to Ifemelu's

viewpoint. Some noticed this in Ifemelu's reaction to Ashanti but few candidates were prepared to look in detail at some of the ways in which Adichie exposes the social reality and alienation of American black people in society. Just occasionally some would comment on the choice of language used to describe Mariabelle and Joan, such as the use of 'costume' for example but in that paragraph there were lots of opportunities to discuss how Adichie uses repetition and sentence structure to generate a critical, sarcastic tone. Many essays were unbalanced, either with some narrative focusing on racism and discrimination in the wider text, or restricted to narrative commentaries of the passage itself. Most of these stayed on the surface of the text, restricting comments to obvious details such as 'race is a brew served mild' and expressing outrage at Peter's comment: 'His wife must feel worse knowing you are black.' The tendency is to note the presence of these details rather than to explore how the thoughts and feelings in the passage are communicated. Few candidates took the opportunity to consider the contribution of such words as 'parody' or 'subtle' to the effects of the writing and the wider concerns of inter-racial, multi-cultural social relations. The weakest answers showed insecure knowledge about the situation and characters and struggled to paraphrase the passage.

2. ARAVIND ADIGA: *The White Tiger*

This new text is also becoming quite popular, with candidates obviously enjoying the social and political satire. The challenge for candidates is to fully appreciate the humour and charm of the narrator's unreliable 'voice' and to generate a literary response. Both questions produced answers across the range, with the (a) question proving to be the more popular and, on the whole, better done by more candidates.

- (a) The most sophisticated responses made good use of the quotation in the question to structure their essays. They used the issue of being a 'man' as a way of selecting material from Balram's childhood and experience of being a servant and discussed the extent to which a reader is seduced into seeing the world from the narrator's point of view. The best answers showed some appreciation of the effects of the lively narrative style and structure. More modest answers argued a vigorous response to the character, making relevant use of specific references and commenting on the symbolic impact of the Rooster Coop and white tiger imagery. The weakest efforts saw the question as an invitation to justify or condemn Balram's action in moral rather than literary terms, with slightly better ones suggesting that the murder was pardonable because it was a product of the corrupt society rather than a man. Some remarked on how Balram's act also involves the indirect murder of his own family, which was excused on the basis of their treatment of him and the suggestion that the setting up of his business and actions as an employer represent a better world than the one the murder displaced. The question stimulated some lively writing with some consideration of alternative opinions shaped into a vigorous, coherent argument.
- (b) This was an accessible passage. Many candidates related to it on a straightforward level showing a clear understanding of the context and content. Those candidates who balanced a close reading of the given text with some discussion of what was 'characteristic' about Balram's voice as a narrator and commentator did well. They considered the provocative impact of phrases such as 'Innocent servants' pleasures' or Balram's views on the 'point of [Ashok's] living'. A few were suspicious of clichéd phrases such as 'my heart just had to melt' and 'I forgave him entirely'. Most felt that the subdued aggression here anticipated Balram's murder of his master and some noted how the relationship was mirrored in the action and the syntax – for example in Ashok saying: 'Drive me ... Anywhere you want', preparing the reader for the inversion of power that is to follow. More modest answers sometimes related the passage to the general topic of master-servant relationships; Balram's experience of this prior to this event and explained the reference to Pinky Madam's hit-and-run incident. Others linked the whisky bottle to the murder scene. Some restricted their discussion solely to the passage and using a running commentary approach, often close to paraphrase, summarised the relationship with some clear understanding of Balram's thoughts and feelings. Weaker responses completely missed the tone and thought that the passage presented Balram in a favourable light, or overinvested in such issues as alcohol abuse, caste, and the extent to which Balram was religious.

3. ATHOL FUGARD: *My Children! My Africa! and The Road to Mecca*

This continues to be a popular text in this component but one with which candidates have only modest success because the majority of candidates do not show adequate detailed knowledge of the plays.

- (a) A few essays considered the terms of the question: what the characters' visions might be and how they might be considered dangerous to others and to themselves. These considerations helped to

structure and develop meaningful comparisons and contrasts. Most were slightly better prepared to discuss Mr M's role as teacher and belief in education as a means of liberation in Apartheid South Africa, and how this brought him into conflict with Thami and the brotherhood on the streets of the location. Fewer were able to explore the significance of Helen's works of art for her own self-expression and validation, and by extension how the creative arts challenge a repressive political society. Most rather generally noted that the religious connotations of Mecca threatened the orthodox pieties of the Afrikaans community. One or two answers considered their roles as 'hero' figures in relation to the outcomes of the plays, as tragic or personally assertive, though some thought that Helen would commit or did commit suicide at the end of the play. Many clearly saw aspects of these issues and sometimes constructed intelligent, fluent arguments but discussion stayed on a rather generalised level with very few specific references to particular scenes. A few mentioned the dramatic impact and symbolism of the ringing of the bell in 'My Children! My Africa!' or the lighted candles in 'The Road to Mecca' and were able to comment on the dramatic irony of these in relation to the idea of personal danger. Many candidates however, did not show any appreciation of the texts as plays because there were no references to the interactions between characters such as Mr M's confrontation with Thami, or Marius's with Helen or Elsa, and no use was made of quotations from the long speeches in which these characters explain themselves.

- (b) This was the more popular option and generally better done by more candidates. The best answers were able to contextualise the extract with broader themes such as the difficulties of inter-racial relationships at this time, or conflict within friendship. Fewer discussed the cultural and political significance of the 'Literary Quiz' though some explained the implications of Thami's withdrawal from it in terms of Mr M's aspirations. Most focused in some detail on the shifting tones of the conversation and what this showed about the characters and their relationship. They focused on Thami's insistence that 'It is not about you and me personally' and Isabel's desperation to show she is also on an inner journey to match Thami's own. Many commented on the use of ellipsis, dashes, questions and exclamations to discuss the emotional effects of the writing. A few candidates showed an understanding of how dialogue works by picking up on the placement and impact of such phrases as 'I have had a good time with you, Isobel/ And I have had an important one with you.' Some noticed how Isabel's verbosity is juxtaposed with Thami's stonewalling, how his increasingly short utterances sound more and more threatening until Isabel's use of the euphemistic 'unrest' is countered by his emphatic use of pronouns and the exclusionary term '*Isiqualo*'. Less effective essays spent too much time giving information about their class and racial differences, in explaining the context of the competition and the political situation, though this sometimes allowed them to at least relate the extract to the whole. Others resorted to running commentaries that were very close to paraphrases of the extract.

4. LIZ LOCHHEAD: *A Choosing*

There were very few takers on this component for this text.

- (a) Very few chose this option. The question was open, inviting candidates to select three poems which dealt with either what appear to be very personal experiences, such as relationships with family or lovers, or memories or to think about more obviously social concerns such as gender issues and stereotypes. Candidates tended to offer a summary of their chosen poems with some biographical information or notes on Lochhead's views on feminism or her role as Makar. While candidates showed some clear basic understanding of the ideas in the poems, success was limited because little attention was paid to Lochhead's methods and effects. There were some general remarks about the colloquial language and humour but very few quotations available for analysis.
- (b) There were a few responses, but the insecure understanding and limited appreciation of form and language together with lack of reference to other poems suggested that most candidates were doing this poem as an unseen. There were however, a few informed discussions which considered the effect of making the poem the persona in the poem and effectively explored how the feelings of vulnerability were presented. Some made a connection between a visit to a prison and the sonnet form and referred to other poems such as "*Epithalamium*" and "*Poets Need Not*". Most found some detail of language to discuss: the more obvious sound effects in 'Brute clang of steel doors, bars, barbed wire, fear,' the use of Scots words and accents for the inmates and other examples of her colloquial style. There were also some intelligent, sensitive discussions of the significance of particular language choices such as the impact of 'in all innocence', the irony of 'this is oor choice' or particular phrases like 'Time that must be done/Not lived...' Weaker essays attempted to extract meaning by paraphrasing the poem and stayed on the surface of the text.

5. KATHERINE MANSFIELD: *Selected Stories*

This continues to be a popular choice of text. Both questions produced answers across the range with the lack of detailed knowledge proving an issue on both questions, as was the overinvestment in biographical information. The **(b)** question was the more popular option.

- (a)** The best scripts considered the terms of the question and chose stories which offered more opportunities for discussing both the nature of the rebellion and how Mansfield presents it. The most productive pairing was 'The Garden Party' and 'The Doll's House' which looked at the use of children as a means of challenging not just ideas about class, but the human experience of it; supported by useful quotations and some understanding of Mansfield's use of symbols. Sometimes one of these stories was effectively linked with 'The Wind' and there was an interesting essay looking at rebellion against the role of wife and mother linking Linda in 'Prelude' with Mrs Kember in 'At the Bay'. A few attempted to deal with male figures who challenge social stereotypes or expectations with varying success. More modest essays showed some awareness of the narrative style and angle of vision and where candidates were able to make some specific references to textual details this allowed them to make some analytical comments. The responses of the majority of the candidates particularly those who tried to use 'Millie', 'Bliss' and 'The Woman at the Store', were restricted, they seemed to be relying on plot summaries and used a narrative approach with basic descriptions or explanations of characters and, in the case of 'Bliss' were often dependent on biographical details of Mansfield's bisexuality. In some cases candidates cast their net too widely by referring superficially to several stories often to write more generally about gender roles. A small minority seemed to either misunderstand the word 'rebel' or were determined to use less obviously appropriate stories like 'Feuille d'Album' just because they knew of them.
- (b)** This question was often well done by candidates whose references to the wider story enabled them to explore class through some detailed analysis of Laura's interactions with the workmen and other members of her family in the earlier part of the story; while at the same time, sensitively appreciating how Mansfield creates Laura's uncomfortable experience in the passage. There were some detailed references to symbolic settings such as the gardens and kitchens, light and dark, and the use of the 'hat', as well as comments on the working class sociolects and deference with some candidates picking up on how threatened Laura felt through the use of such words as 'queerly', 'oily' and 'sly'. The best essays systematically explored the impact of the language: the way the syntax conveys Laura's acute self-consciousness through: 'to be covered up in anything, one of those women's shawls even' and the effects and implications of the description of the corpse. Confident candidates discussed the ambiguity of the ending in detail, as well as referring to similar endings of other stories as a 'characteristic.' There was also some relevant linking through the use of children and the issues of class to 'The Doll's House'. More modest essays focused rather narrowly on the class issues, or talked rather generally of 'stream of consciousness' and 'epiphany' without showing what it was, or how it was relevant to this story. Some weaker essays showed insecure knowledge of the wider story or none at all, and did not know what to make of Laura's vision of the dead man, offering personal religious views; many ignored the ending completely.

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Candidates who take the time to quickly plan out an answer to the question tend to do better because the exercise encourages them to deconstruct the question, think of a range of ideas in response to it, as well as identifying specific bits of evidence to illustrate some deeper understanding of methods.

General comments

The paper was comparable in difficulty with those of other sessions and all questions were accessible. There was some enthusiastic take up of the newer novels '*Americanah*' and '*The White Tiger*', but all of the texts seemed to stimulate some lively engagement with the writers' concerns and in many cases a sophisticated appreciation of ways in which writers shape a reader's response. The most impressive scripts offered detailed analysis and substantive textual and contextual knowledge; using a range of apt literary and linguistic devices to display a skilful appreciation of the texts as literature rather than social documentaries. There was also evidence of wider critical reading being effectively linked to textual detail and used to present alternative opinions or support a case. There were however, a large number of scripts on the borderline between levels 2 and 3, or levels 3 and 4 who, despite the fact that they could often express themselves fluently and, indeed generated coherent, intelligent arguments in response to the **(a)** questions; nevertheless achieved only modest marks because of lack of attention to detail. Potentially effective arguments were too frequently supported by brief, generalised references to the plot or a writer's concerns and many candidates writing on the plays or short stories offered no textual references to specific scenes or what characters said or thought at all. Some candidates, aware perhaps of their lack of detailed knowledge, ignored the instructions in some questions to refer to 'two short stories' or two or three poems. These restrictions are there to encourage candidates to look in-depth at how a writer or poet presents ideas by offering opportunities for comparison and contrast; no additional marks are awarded for short narrative summaries of a larger number of stories or poems. It is helpful for candidates to study and revise short stories and poems in pairs and, as with all the texts, select and learn some pertinent quotations which can be used not only to support opinions about themes or characters, but analysed to show understanding of a range of methods and effects. Similarly, candidates with modest marks who chose the **(b)** questions needed to pay more attention to the 'effects of the writing' in the passages and show evidence of an ability to do some close reading and analysis. It is sometimes helpful to offer immediate textual, literary, historical, philosophical or cultural contexts, but not as overlong generalised introductions. This material together with detailed references to the wider texts needs to be carefully balanced and integrated into a more systematic discussion of the writers' presentation of ideas, characters or feelings in the given passage or poem, through their choice of language and control of rhythm and tone.

The best scripts often showed evidence of a plan and some consideration of the terms of the question. For example they looked at the instructive phrases like 'By what means and with what effects' and quickly listed aspects of methods which were then dealt with in more detail in the main body of the essay. They made apt use of a critical vocabulary such as 'point of view', 'persona', 'stream of consciousness', 'imagery' and 'symbolism'. Less consideration was given to diction, tone and sound effects of language and the impact of

sentence structure or juxtaposition, but effective essays looked at the different ways irony, empathy and pathos are generated. Confident use of such terms helps candidates to develop their ideas with more precision and depth and usually enhances their appreciation of the texts as literature. Weaker candidates tend to be cavalier about the genre of their texts, referring to plays as novels and not surprisingly, finding it difficult to see the texts or extracts in dramatic terms. Many basic summaries of dramatic extracts would be improved by more frequent consideration of the possible effects on the audience of particular words or actions in the interactions between characters. The concept of 'stichomythia' – the rapid exchange of short lines between different characters – is useful to explore the structure and effects created in dramatic dialogue. Candidates continue to find the poetry texts and aspects of poetic form rather challenging. Less accomplished scripts relied on textual summary and received opinions to direct the course of discussions, but there were some sensitive readings and appreciations of aspects of poetic methods. Candidates choosing the **(b)** question should be reminded to include some relevant references to the wider text and advised against doing the given poem if it is less familiar or as an unseen.

Successful candidates had enough detailed knowledge of the texts to write two fairly equal, substantial essays. Most candidates were able to express themselves clearly with only occasional lapses in fluency, though a few in the lower levels were restricted to the expression of simple ideas which impeded their communication of literary understanding. There were very few rubric errors, though one candidate offered two Mansfield stories which are not on the set list and another offered two questions on the same text. Some candidates seem to find it hard to decide whether to do the **(a)** or **(b)** question, and begin one then drift into the other, or artfully do not designate which question they are doing and leave the Examiner to decide which would allow for a higher mark. This is not a good strategy. Generally speaking success comes to those who throughout their course make strategic use of the mark scheme in planning their answers and have lots of practice in close reading and analysing short snippets from the texts. These exercises provide detailed material for **(a)** questions and transferable skills, as well as specific references to the wider text for those opting for the **(b)** questions. A clear understanding of the content will only get candidates into the lower levels and to be more successful they need to display an ability to select and analyse significant details – particularly of language to deepen their discussion of ideas and appreciation of effects.

Comments on specific questions

1. CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE: *Americanah*

This is becoming a popular text. Most candidates show an enthusiastic engagement with the storyline and the writer's concerns and in many cases, a good recall of significant narrative detail. The more popular option was the **(a)** question.

- (a)** Most candidates could retrieve examples of prejudice, discrimination, alienation and suffering in a range of social situations. The key discriminating factor was the extent to which candidates paid attention to the terms of the question and gave detailed consideration to the 'means' i.e. the various narrative methods used to present these issues and their effects. Some intelligent and well supported essays dealing with cultural identity and assimilation tended to read as if they were responses to a psycho-sociological textbook on race. Not many had much to say about the blog as a focalising lens for a black immigrant's response to racism and some detailed knowledge would have been useful here. For example, Ifemelu's blogs being used to explain: 'What Hispanic means to Non-American blacks' or 'Race is class' or 'How racism exists but all racists are gone'. Very few viewed the writing of the blog as a positive, creative response to victimhood which enabled Ifemelu to find her own voice and identity. Most candidates used particular characters such as Auntie Uju, Ifemelu and Dike as a way of structuring their response. Most were also able to discuss the significance of hair and accent in the novel for racial identity. The best scripts commented on the effects of the retrospective structure and various points of view, bringing out the difference between more reflective moments when the third person narrator is used to present Ifemelu's thoughts and feelings in contrast to the provocative, colloquial often humorous tone of the blogs. Everyone enjoyed the crack about Obama's election hopes being dependent on the 'relaxation' of Michelle Obama's hair. More modest answers tended to rely on narrative summary and found it more difficult to generate a structured argument.
- (b)** This was a very rich passage and many candidates were able to show evidence of intelligent close reading and appreciation of the various ways Adichie shapes a reader's response to the characters here; while at the same time broadening the discussion to relate the passage to the wider text and writer's concerns about identity, social relationships, class and snobbery. More modest essays tended to restrict discussion solely to the passage, starting at the beginning and working through, but better responses chose a point of entry, such as the way the indirect free discourse style allows

the scene to be filtered through Obinze's disapproving eye, the paradox of Kosi's 'immodest modesty' clearly being a projection of his thoughts. Others noted the sense of cultural insecurity amongst Nigerians in the discussion about education and explained with reference to the wider text, how Obinze's disappointing experience of the UK and his marriage made him into an outsider; someone who could not 'share their certainties' and questioned 'what should be'. Most made some comment on the presentation of Kosi as a stereotypical anxious-to-please Nigerian wife and picked up on the descriptive phrase 'no sharp angles sticking out' to compare her flattened, domestic ideas of femininity and its preoccupation with beauty regimens with Ifemelu's more challenging brand of femininity. The best scripts looked closely at the language and noted, for example, the prevailing negativity of the character 'types' – with references to female pimping, withered charms, swollen bellies and so on, presenting through Obinze's eyes, the degraded reality of Nigerian femininity beneath the 'exaggerated' charm of Kosi. They identified the effect as being a sense of Obinze's bitter detachment from his society and regret at losing Ifemelu. Weaker responses picked up on some of this but in a general way, to launch into a narrative account of Obinze's relationship with Kosi and Ifemelu on her return.

2. ARAVIND ADIGA: *The White Tiger*

There was some take-up of this new, accessible text with candidates obviously enjoying the social and political satire. The challenge for candidates is to fully appreciate the humour and charm of the narrator's unreliable 'voice' and to generate a literary response, rather than to treat the novel as some kind of documentary. Both questions produced answers across the range, with the (a) question being slightly more popular.

- (a) The best responses confidently argued a case in response to the quotation with most recognising the humanity of Balram's refusal to accept the inequality of his lot. This produced some perceptive, well-evidenced responses with some sophisticated understanding of Balram, and some of the ways Adiga complicates a reader's response to the character. Good essays had lots of quotations to illustrate how Balram seeks to justify his actions with carefully selected specific narrative details from his account of his childhood, experience of being a servant, and observations of Indian political and social life. At the same time there was some detailed analysis of how Adiga's choice of language and use of symbolism seduces the reader to sympathise with the character. A few candidates argued that nothing could excuse the murder and Balram's callous acceptance of the death of his whole family, and while some of these came to this conclusion after some consideration of the extenuating circumstances, most wrote rather generally about how devious and corrupt Balram himself became and asserted that Ashok was in fact a decent master. Less confident answers ignored the quotation, focusing instead on character presentation through narrative summary with varying degrees of detailed knowledge and without drawing moral conclusions.
- (b) There were a few extremely detailed, sensitive responses to the passage, informed by secure, wider textual knowledge which displayed an intelligent understanding and appreciation of a broad range of aspects of Adiga's narrative methods. Most were able to explain the significance and structural use of the Rooster Coop but the best made perceptive comments on the poetic quality of the writing, the visceral imagery, use of repetition and the different effects of specific examples of sentence structure. Some merely mentioned the letter form but better essays looked at the way the language generates a sense of assumed equality with the Chinese Premier and how the detailed examples create trust in Balram's observations and help to justify his actions. So while some candidates occasionally noted the use of rhetorical questions, imperatives, taboo lexis, the direct address – for example in the challenge at the end of the passage – better answers analysed specific examples to show how ideas of rebellion, entrapment, and the enslaved mentality are communicated, how the tone is generated by the choice of language and how these persuasive techniques shape a reader's response to the character. Weaker essays either did not pay enough attention to the detail of the passage, or tended to work through it, often relapsing into narrative summary, with occasional comments on the significance of the details – such as the foreshadowing of Balram's own theft of the 'red bag' of money to start his 'new life.'

3. ATHOL FUGARD: *My Children! My Africa!* and *The Road to Mecca*

This remains a minority choice of text on this component. Success is often modest because, while candidates clearly understand the context, know the plots and can relate to the characters; analysis of the dramatist's craft remains a challenge for the majority.

- (a) This was the less popular option with the better answers focusing on the terms of the question and exploring the characters as outsiders and their roles in challenging received ideas about inter-racial relations, self-determination, independence and responsibility, while others focused more straightforwardly on friendship and trust. Candidates seemed to have more detail available on Elsa: and her role as a teacher and as the supportive friend of Helen, who understands the importance of Helen's art to Helen herself and how it threatens the narrow ideas of her religious community. Treatment of Isobel tended to be more general and restricted to her role in the plot. Very few were able to look at specific scenes in detail and the dramatic effects created by her enthusiasm for the competition and openness to a relationship with Thami, her challenging Mr M on his relationship with Thami and the tension generated by her fear that Thami was responsible for Mr M's murder. Lack of quotations made it difficult for candidates to explore how Fugard generates conflict and emotional impact through these two characters.
- (b) Candidates tended to do rather better on this question. Most were able to relate the passage to the wider text and paid some close attention to Marius's long speech, picking out the insults buried amidst the expressions of concern which many saw as pompous or hypocritical- a ploy to win the battle of ideas which fails. Several mentioned the Fugardian theme of friendship and female 'strength in unity' as well as the writer's critique of authoritarian masculinity, implicit here but explicit elsewhere in the two plays. The best looked at the power dynamics through the scene, making good use of the stage directions that reveal the power shifts: the effect of Elsa's laughter; what she means by 'dangerous', the punctuation that shows the breakdown of Marius's articulacy, and the way Helen emerges as a newly confident person at the end of this scene. There were a few sophisticated discussions on the significance of Helen's art as a sort of counter-religion of Jungian individuation whereby she can find the means to explore and express her growing awareness and sense of self. This was supported by Elsa's closing words which equate Helen's 'glittering' life with the art that she creates. More modest answers showed a clear understanding of the situation and characters, paying some attention to more obvious details such as the negative impact of words like 'nightmare' and 'idolatry'; the reference to Helen's 'physical well-being and safety' and the possible significance of the owl as a symbol of wisdom.

4. LIZ LOCHHEAD: *A Choosing*

This is the quite a popular choice of text on this component, with many candidates able to show a personal, critical appreciation of the poems based on some perceptive close reading and detailed analysis. The (a) question was slightly more popular than the (b) question here.

- (a) Most candidates chose a range of relevant poems and effectively teased out the perception of female identity in relation to imagery, tone and poetic structure. The best answers made a thesis which helped to structure the essay and develop ideas, for example looking at how identity is formed in youth with '*Poem for My Sister*' or '*A Choosing*', or threatened in '*Revelation*'; or how identity is maintained and perceived later on in '*For my Grandmother Knitting*' and '*Everybody's Mother*'. Others were interested in how Lochhead creates various effects through her use of stereotypes as in '*Rapunzstiltskin*', '*My Rival's House*' and '*Everybody's Mother*'. Good answers made effective use of well-integrated quotations which were analysed for choice of language, use of metaphor and cliché and control over rhythm and tone. In many cases there was effective appreciation of how Lochhead creates a distinctive voice in each poem. More modest responses showed clear understanding of the content of the chosen poems, but the treatment of the poetic methods and effects was restricted to obvious aspects and rather generalised. Weaker essays relied on summarised accounts.
- (b) This was perhaps a less-studied poem or the question was chosen by less confident candidates because the majority were preoccupied with repeating the poem's 'meaning' – reduced to the rather bland 'poets don't need prizes, the poem is its own reward'. There was often very little discussion of what was characteristic about it and no reference to other poems. The best answers looked more closely at the way Lochhead describes the writing process and a few were able to sustain some analysis of the choice of language: the use of the classical image of the laurel wreath set against the banality of the 'train', 'biro' and 'bin'; the tongue-in-cheek use of cliché and the metaphoric use of natural imagery. Not many were able to discuss the effects of the variety of syntax and line length, the use of caesura, the combined sound effects of the alliteration, onomatopoeia and repetition in places, or consider the effects at particular places of full rhyme. One very good essay picked up on the idea of the way poetry has 'of attaching itself to a familiar phrase/in a new way' as a means of linking witty or surprising phrases from other poems into the discussion. The most effective references were to 'Visit, Sonnet' but one or two discussed poems

which considered aspects of the visual arts or composition. Weaker candidates worked through the poem with some reliance on paraphrase and occasionally commented on some of the more obvious aspects of language such as the incidences of alliteration or how the reference to the River Kelvin and use of 'footering' were evidence of Lochhead's Scottish heritage.

Question 5 KATHERINE MANSFIELD: *Selected Stories*

This continues to be the second most popular text and many candidates displayed good personal engagement with their chosen stories with an ability to discuss aspects of Mansfield's modernist prose style and use of the short story form. Generally speaking there has been an improvement in the way candidates try to integrate contextual and biographical details into the body of the argument though some still use a 'bolt-on' approach. Some candidates also still seem to mistakenly think Mansfield was writing in the Victorian era. The (a) question was only slightly more popular than the (b) question here.

- (a) The majority of candidates compared how Mansfield presents the experience of class in 'The Garden Party' and 'A Doll's House', focusing on the significance of using children, how and to what extent Laura and Kezia are consciously aware of class issues, adult attitudes and how they affect the children; contrasting the sensitive Laura, anxious to do the right thing, with the spiteful Lena's goading of the little Kelveys. Sometimes one of these stories was used with 'The Woman at the Store'. Most showed at least a competent ability to select relevant knowledge with some apt quotations. Others made a case for women as an 'underclass', sometimes quite successfully and compared Linda in 'At the Bay' with the woman in 'The Woman at the Store' or the different glimpses of the gender and social politics in 'Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding'. Some were less confident in analysing Mansfield's narrative methods and tended to restrict discussion to the use of symbolism, or use of sociolect to 'place' characters in the working class, or individual instances of choice of language such as the dehumanising effect of Aunt Beryl shooing the Kelveys out of the yard 'as if they were chickens.'
- (b) There were some good responses which teased out the narrative structure and imagery of the passage in relation to the rest of the story. Most focused on building up a portrait of Matilda's youthful passion by referencing the rebellious voice, the significance of the mirror and the 'excited eyes and hot lips' and the sensuous language used to describe her experience of the wind and the sea. They offered alternative views of the ending – as a kind of jump-cut into the future or an imaginative projection to show the desire to escape the restrictions of female roles symbolised in the darning of 'those stockings' and parental control. There was often some perceptive analysis of description of the steamer and the symbolism of the 'open gate between the pointed rocks' together with the effect of the ellipses in that paragraph creating a sense of a leap into the unknown. Others sometimes argued with less convincing detail, that the whole story was retrospective, a memory. Less assured essays did not appear to know the rest of the story and stayed on the surface of the passage with sometimes sensible comments on the feelings of the character and occasional appreciation of the visual effects of particular similes. Some wrote enthusiastically, but rather generally about authorial perspective; the term 'stream of consciousness' was banded about in lieu of actual analysis of the fragmented narrative and its various 'voices'. Those who appreciated the ambiguity of the ending often linked this aspect of Mansfield's craft to other stories, while others side-stepped the issue and took refuge in biographical details of Mansfield's own departure from New Zealand. Pre-occupation with Mansfield's sexuality sometimes led to a rather restricted reading of the passage as being about gender roles, arguing that the descriptions of Matilda and Bogey's clothes being so alike suggested that they would continue to be similar, were it not for the social imposition of gender roles.

Question 6 ARTHUR MILLER: *Death of a Salesman*

This was by far the most popular text and often very well prepared with useful quotations from the text and critical reading and some appreciation of the various dramatic methods and effects. Others however, tended to adopt a linear, narrative or descriptive approach; encouraged perhaps by reading the text and referring to it as a 'novel'. Candidates might find it helpful to talk of characters more often in terms of function or roles, to use phrases such as 'Miller presents...' or 'Miller creates...' so that they can avoid treating the characters as though they were real and develop a more analytical approach. Both questions were popular and both produced answers across the range.

- (a) This was often done well with the best answers teasing out the respective failings of the sons and how they mirrored or challenged Willy's warped view of himself and his aspirations for them to become successful businessmen. Many had detailed knowledge of the relationships and adopted an explanatory, psychological approach explaining Willy in terms of his abandonment by father and desire to emulate the success of his brother. They were concerned to show that Biff's failure is not just due to the shock of discovering Willy's infidelity but also because of Willy's cavalier attitude to the theft of the ball and the building supplies and his insistence 'being well-liked' taught the boys the 'wrong' values. Happy's unhappiness with his job, his womanising and determination to 'win' the battle for Willy's dream at the end were seen as a function of Willy's neglect in favour of Biff when he was young. Better essays considered the terms of the question and included details of the presentation, comparing the romanticised relationship in the flashbacks with the painful realities of the scene in the chop house and the dramatic impact of Biff's final confrontation with his father with the various dramatic ironies of Willy's reaction to it. Weaker essays offered character portraits, relying more heavily on plot summary and over-investing in general discussion about the American Dream or the need for hard work, and difficulties of dealing with a parent's expectations.
- (b) Again there were many good, detailed, perceptive readings of the extract, focusing on Biff's struggle to tell the 'truth' against the countervailing pressure of Willy's fictions and manipulations. For example, some looked at the dramatic effects of Miller's repetition of the word 'welcome'; several considered the burning/fired imagery and linked the 'woods' to the play's pastoral imagery of seeds and flutes. Good essays got to the end of the extract and discussed the dramatic effects of the rapid exchange of lines – the 'stichomythia' – and how this generates Biff's extreme frustration, how the hopelessness of his final line foreshadows his last attempt to make his father accept the 'fact' that both are 'a dime a dozen'. More modest essays stayed on the surface of the text but showed a clear-to-sound understanding of the significance of the scene in terms of the plot and relationships. Many noted Happy's role here in supporting Willy's illusions. They often tended to neglect the effects of the language in the extract failing to pick up on details such as the irony of Willy not being interested 'in stories about the past', or that 'the woman has suffered'; instead launching into rather too much detail from the wider text or too much generalised discussion of the failure of the American Dream.

7. WB YEATS: *Selected Poems*

This is a minority text which is often done well by candidates who are well informed about the context and Yeats's concerns and for whom detailed study brings an appreciation of the intricacies of his poetic methods and effects. The challenge for candidates responding on Yeats is that notes on the historical and literary context, his philosophy, his preoccupation with the state of Ireland and obsession with Maud Gonne are necessary in order to study the poems. However, when writing about the poems this information should not be a substitute for a discussion of the poems themselves. Although some candidates managed the questions successfully, many found themselves out of their depth and took refuge in lengthy expositions of this contextual material. The (a) question was the more popular option and often better done than the given poem.

- (a) Better answers placed 'loss of hope' within a context in order to generate a thesis. Some were interested in Yeats's views on society, politics and culture and examined the shift from regret in 'September 1913' to a sense of foreboding in 'The Second Coming' and bitter resignation in 'Sailing to Byzantium'. Others pursued the Maud Gonne connection and tended to do quite well with 'No Second Troy' which was paired with either the ending of 'Adam's Curse' or 'The Cold Heaven'. Some candidates had a wealth of quotations and sensitively teased out the emotional impact of the choice of language and how control of rhythm and tone contributed to the effects of the poems. Many genuinely appreciated the complexity and resonating power of particular images and showed some ability to analyse some of the ways Yeats uses poetic form, diction and sentence structure to create a 'voice' in each poem. Less assured essays sometimes quoted without analysis, tending to give a summarised account of the poems with only occasional consideration of specific details of method or effect, and rather too much background information.
- (b) There were a few proficient essays on 'The Fisherman' which attempted to cover a range of ideas: Yeats's view of himself as a poet, his romanticised view of his audience symbolised in the 'wise and simple' fisherman, his disillusionment with 'commonest ear' and defiant determination to write 'one /Poem that is as cold/ And passionate as the dawn.' A few were able to discuss the effects of the paradoxical language at the end and some with varying degrees of success noted aspects of the form: the short lines, the long sentences, use of repetition and rhyming couplets and attempted to show how this linked to the idea of simplicity; how a simple description of a simple man

transforms into a complex expression of feeling to produce a poem. Weaker essays stayed on the surface of the text, trying to extract its meaning. Many wanted to explain what the fisherman represented but did not look closely enough at the language or the development in the use of the image in the second stanza. Although some noted the repetition and listing of the men in the 'reality' section most passed over the meaning and tone of the language here. These answers tended to show partial understanding of the given poem but were sometimes able to focus on 'characteristics' and make sensible links to the wider text. Some picked up on the romanticism of the natural environment and made productive comparisons with '*The Lake Isle of Innisfree*', or Yeats's critical attitude to the Irish people and linked the poem to '*September 1913*'. Others contrasted the defiance in the last lines with attitudes to himself as an old man in '*Sailing to Byzantium*'. Some essays however were either restricted to weak attempts at paraphrasing or general accounts of Yeats's concerns.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key Messages:

Good answers:

Demonstrate that candidates have read and considered their chosen poems or passages as a whole before starting to write;

Do not rely upon narrative or paraphrase, but focus upon the form, structure and language of the poems or passages, and upon how these shape meaning;

Show how literary devices and techniques are used by the writers to create particular effects and responses;

Use personal responses to reflect the ways in which the poem or passage is written, not simply to what is said;

Maintain a tight focus on the poem or passage throughout their response, and do not discuss other writers or other ideas;

Make it clear that the passages – prose and drama especially – are works of fiction and that the characters and events have been created by the writers.

General Comments

This was overall a pleasing session; responses showed that most candidates had taken notice of at least most of the points listed above, and what they wrote was in most cases very firmly rooted in what each passage or poem said. Some candidates seemed determined to pursue their own individual interpretations, often to the point where they lost sight of what the passage was clearly saying. For example, more than one response noted the phrase “the alien sounds” in line 5 of **Question 1** and assumed that the people being met by the lady must be from a distant planet, forgetting what “alien” conventionally means and ignoring its context in the passage. Similarly, and while this may be a possible explanation of Ben’s situation in **Question 2**, there is nothing at all in the passage to support the assertion made by several candidates that he must be a drug dealer, particularly as all he asks the speaker to keep is “papers and stuff”. And lastly, there is nothing in the poem in **Question 3** to suggest that this is not just a poem about a particular moment, or moments in the speaker’s memory but rather a poem about unfulfilled sexual longing. In all these cases, candidates were not following the advice offered in bullet 5 above. A surprising number also made sometimes quite lengthy reference to other novels or poems they had read, rather than focusing entirely upon what was printed on the question paper; what they said was often quite thoughtful, but every sentence written about another text was a sentence that was not addressing the question set.

There were some responses that ignored the advice in bullet 2, spending time – often a lot of time – simply outlining what “happens” in each passage or poem; if such paraphrase also led to discussion of the writer’s techniques then it could be relevant and appropriate, but an answer simply showing that a candidate has read and understood the “story” of what is written could not attract more than a very few marks.

Bullet point 4 stresses the need for personal response to be directed towards the ways in which the writer has created her or his effects, not to the situation being described. So those many candidates who said how much they shared the newly married lady’s sense of isolation and loneliness in **Question 1** certainly demonstrated some fellow feeling, but if it was simply because they too had experienced a sense of not belonging then it was generally not relevant to a critical response.

A small but significant number of candidates wanted to identify and illustrate how each writer used particular themes and took this approach as a kind of template for their responses, with a paragraph devoted to each. For example the theme of trust (**Question 2**), of friendship (**Question 2**), of love (**Question 3**), of nature (**Question 3**), of nervousness (**Question 1**) etc. A better approach, and a more critically sophisticated one too, would be to discuss what the passage says about trust, friendship and other possible themes, and how these are illustrated and developed. It is unlikely that any writer will have set out quite deliberately to write about particular themes and made what they write fit these ideas.

One rather strange but quite common error lay in candidates saying that a piece was written in the second person narrative, which is certainly not the case in any of the three passages or poem here; the second person is “you”. **Question 1** uses the third person, **Question 2** the first person, and **Question 3** a mixture of third and first.

All candidates responded to two questions, though some responses were clearly incomplete; stopping very abruptly or covering only part of the passage or poem. Timing is very important, as no matter how good an unfinished answer may be, examiners cannot offer marks for what is not there, even when it might theoretically be as good as what is actually completed. Handwriting was mostly clear, but candidates must remember that what they write has to be read by examiners, who will take enormous care to read as much as they can, but if it becomes seriously difficult or even impossible to read then marks may inevitably suffer.

Comments on Specific Questions

1 The First Party, Attia Hosain

This was the most frequently answered question on the paper and it led to some perceptive responses that employed good analytical skills to explore a variety of ideas. Most correctly identified the third person narrative approach here and often were able to link this to enabling the writer to convey, in detail, the feelings of the woman at the centre of the narrative. There were some interesting comments suggesting that because the whole episode is seen through the eyes of an objective narrator we are to some extent guided by the writer to view each character more objectively than we might if it had been written from a first person viewpoint. Linked to this is the fact that none of the characters is given a name; this makes the husband, the tall woman and the fat man slightly shadowy and perhaps even slightly ominous characters. The young wife herself is identified primarily by her changing feelings, rather than by any other feature; though her clothing does play an important role in this respect. The contrast between the dimness of the veranda and the bewildering brightness of the room was often commented on with some candidates going on to develop points about the symbolic importance of this opening. Some linked this to the significance of the ‘stumble’ and the ‘nervousness and panic’ of the wife. Many candidates were sensitive to the feelings of the wife, the idea that English was not her first language and that she had recently married a man who was a fluent English speaker. Some candidates discussed the possibility of this being an arranged marriage, or between an Indian woman and a European man, though these are not established facts in the passage.

The passage contained several references signalling the wife’s unease and nervousness at having to interact with strange people in a situation that she was unfamiliar with. Some saw the symbolic potential in her ‘*sitting on the edge of a big chair*’, and the effects of phrases such as ‘*shoulders drooping*’, and ‘*nervously pulling...*’. The weight of her heavy sari was often and surely correctly seen as metaphorically illustrative of the weight that she felt of her culture and its significance, contrasting so strongly with that of the other characters and perhaps preventing her from feeling at ease in their company.

The relationship between the wife and her new husband produced a range of interesting points with some candidates seeing him as supportive and reassuring: ‘*Her husband was already steadying her*’ and ‘*her husband came and stood by her*’. Others though, saw him as controlling and insensitive to her feelings in this situation: ‘*by the pressure of his hand*’ and ‘*She’ll soon get over it*’. Candidates who took this view also sometimes pointed to the wife’s feeling that her husband and the tall woman were talking about her and commented on his lack of concern about the patronising descriptions of her such as ‘*shy little thing...*’.

Many candidates were also aware of the potential the extract provided to explore issues around the clash of cultures often seeing this as an 'East' meets 'West' situation. The contrast between the wife and the 'tall woman' and the description and effects created by the imagery to do with their nails and ideas about 'dress' were often at the centre of such discussion. Some perceptive candidates also detected the shift in the wife's attitude towards the end of the extract as '*her discomfort changed to uneasy defiance.*'

A few candidates found some difficulty in identifying the characters, with more than a few suggesting that the fat man was the husband, a reminder of the importance of doing what bullet point 1 above says.

2 *A Dry White Season*, André Brink

Slightly less popular than **Question 1**, this passage nonetheless attracted a large number of responses, often very perceptive and critically thoughtful. Almost all commented on the striking opening sentence, immediately setting up an atmosphere of tension and uncertainty, which lasts throughout the whole passage; the expression "*in media res*" was used by several candidates, suggesting how the writer throws us straight into the situation, and perhaps foreshadowing the lack of clarity which pervades the presentation of Ben and his nervousness. Ben's brief and often unfinished sentences on the telephone clearly indicate a worried, even panicked mood, particularly when he ends the conversation so suddenly. Many noted that he is ringing "*from the station*"; but there is no evidence at all to suggest that this is a police station, particularly as the narrator assumes that it must be a train station, and certainly it is not in any way at all proof of Ben's criminal past, as quite a number of candidates insisted. In the words of one examiner, "*Ben was deemed likely to be an unreliable criminal by some, again suggesting the need for more careful and considered reading of the extract.*"

When the two friends meet, the narrator's description of Ben is particularly striking, and the comparison of him to a scarecrow is ominous, possibly blackly humorous, but surely not a piece of comic relief as several candidates said. What a good number noted was the irony that, whereas a scarecrow is used to frighten birds away, it is used here to show Ben as the scared and frightened one: normality has been reversed. His grey and large overcoat may be evidence that he is using it as a form of disguise as he tries to flee from the mysterious and unnamed "them", or it may equally be used by the writer to illustrate Ben's physical shrinking, and the ominously grey world into which he appears to be living now. His impatient rejoinders to the narrator's understandably worried questions, and the fact that he almost pulls the speaker along with him (line 29); ignoring the red traffic lights in his urgency to move away from the bookshop, his insistence that they should go "*nowhere. Just round the block*", further emphasises his increasing fear and panic. The narrator tries to calm him down, to establish just what "*some stuff*" is but Ben's continuing answers are all brief, incomplete and fail to answer anything; the writer is creating a mood of growing tension and anxiety and good candidates will make this point clearly – it is the writer who is doing this, rather than anything that the two completely fictional characters say and do (see bullet 6 above).

The passage ends on a note of complete uncertainty and even terror – Ben's "*if something does happen to me* –" is especially alarming and the "*harsh brief sound*" gives the passage a chilling conclusion. This final, harsh, brief laugh was cited by some as further evidence of the seriousness of his plight, adding to the increasingly dark and serious nature of the situation being presented by the writer. Just before this, as noted by a few candidates, Ben "*jerked his shoulders, as if to prevent his coat from slipping off*" and whatever the significance of this grey coat, it is surely significant that Ben desperately wants to keep it on.

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This was the least popular question though it did lead to some confident and critically strong responses; the situation presented by the poet is really a very clear one, the speaker nostalgically recalls watching Alleyne washing and eating mangoes over a number of years and thinks about him and what he did with affection. The relationship between the two – Alleyne and the speaker – is not specified, and so does not matter; those candidates who were determined that they were children, or that they were lovers, or that the speaker wishes that they had been lovers were simply speculating beyond what is written. It is a short poem but there was no need to add unnecessary and unsupported suggestions beyond what is there, there is plenty of poetic technique and language method to write about.

The candidate who wrote "*The title of this poem is 'Mango'. This poem is about mangoes*" was not merely adopting an overly simplistic approach inappropriate at A-Level, but she or he was actually wrong. The poem is not just, or even really, about mangoes; they are used as a means to portray something else entirely. The focus of the poem is very firmly upon Alleyne and his eating of mangoes. We are not told what age Alleyne is, although the slow and deliberate way that he prepares and eats the fruit would seem to imply that he is at

least adult and possibly elderly, though several candidates seemed confident that he was a boy and even, despite the words “his” and “him”, that he is in fact a woman.

Most candidates noted that the poem consists of only five sentences and that there is no regular metrical pattern, and certainly no rhyme scheme. These points are undeniable, and in a way not worthy of much discussion; though there were some quite thoughtful suggestions as to why these features might be relevant to any discussion. The significant point however, as mentioned by many, is the slow movement of the first long sentence, stretched over seven of the poem’s 16 lines (having 16 lines, incidentally, and no rhyme, means that it is certainly not a sonnet). This sentence, with prolonged descriptions of Alleyne, mirrors the slow deliberation with which he eats. It takes five or six lines before he starts to eat, then line 7 (“*and slowly eat his mangoes....*”) contains some strikingly slow language and images, noted and discussed by almost all candidates. The fact that the word “seed” is dropped onto its own line perhaps illustrates and echoes the fact that Alleyne eats every last morsel, such is his enjoyment of the fruit. The earlier lines establish a sense of calm, warm, restful quiet; Sunday afternoons are, as again almost all candidates said, traditionally a time of relaxation and the natural background that is presented by the poet adds to the sense of rich and fruitful completion.

Line 9 (“*His felt hat....*”) opens with this brief description – the only moment where Alleyne is actually described – then returns to his slow and thoroughly restful eating; line 12 (“*him eating slowly....*”) like line 7 suggests Alleyne’s peaceful and unselfconscious manner. The unexpected and syntactically unusual conclusion to this sentence in the words “*I remember*” brings the speaker suddenly into focus, and the poem shifts quite markedly. The speaker watches Alleyne, reading him metaphorically in the same way as he would read the book he is holding and over which he is looking.

The last four words of the poem are very striking, and led to some interesting thoughts from many candidates. Are they simply casual, suggesting that the memory is in fact unimportant? Are they significantly nostalgic? Are they suggestive of a longing to return to the simplicity of the life the speaker recalls? Do they imply any kind of love between the two characters? Does Alleyne even know that he is being watched? There can obviously be no answer for us to these questions, but candidates who ignored the words missed what is clearly a significant conclusion to the poem. An asserted interpretation was not always helpful, but those who made suggestions linked firmly to what the poem actually says, often demonstrated some sensitivity to the poet and his writing.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key Messages:

Good answers:

Demonstrate that candidates have read and considered their chosen poems or passages as a whole before starting to write;

Do not rely upon narrative or paraphrase, but focus upon the form, structure and language of the poems or passages, and upon how these shape meaning;

Show how literary devices and techniques are used by the writers to create particular effects and responses;

Use personal responses to reflect the ways in which the poem or passage is written, not simply to what is said;

Maintain a tight focus on the poem or passage throughout their response, and do not discuss other writers or other ideas;

Make it clear that the passages – prose and drama especially – are works of fiction and that the characters and events have been created by the writers.

General Comments

This was overall a pleasing session; responses showed that most candidates had taken notice of at least most of the points listed above, and what they wrote was in most cases very firmly rooted in what each passage or poem said. Some candidates seemed determined to pursue their own individual interpretations, often to the point where they lost sight of what the passage was clearly saying. For example, more than one response noted the phrase “the alien sounds” in line 5 of **Question 1** and assumed that the people being met by the lady must be from a distant planet, forgetting what “alien” conventionally means and ignoring its context in the passage. Similarly, and while this may be a possible explanation of Ben’s situation in **Question 2**, there is nothing at all in the passage to support the assertion made by several candidates that he must be a drug dealer, particularly as all he asks the speaker to keep is “papers and stuff”. And lastly, there is nothing in the poem in **Question 3** to suggest that this is not just a poem about a particular moment, or moments in the speaker’s memory but rather a poem about unfulfilled sexual longing. In all these cases, candidates were not following the advice offered in bullet 5 above. A surprising number also made sometimes quite lengthy reference to other novels or poems they had read, rather than focusing entirely upon what was printed on the question paper; what they said was often quite thoughtful, but every sentence written about another text was a sentence that was not addressing the question set.

There were some responses that ignored the advice in bullet 2, spending time – often a lot of time – simply outlining what “happens” in each passage or poem; if such paraphrase also led to discussion of the writer’s techniques then it could be relevant and appropriate, but an answer simply showing that a candidate has read and understood the “story” of what is written could not attract more than a very few marks.

Bullet point 4 stresses the need for personal response to be directed towards the ways in which the writer has created her or his effects, not to the situation being described. So those many candidates who said how much they shared the newly married lady’s sense of isolation and loneliness in **Question 1** certainly demonstrated some fellow feeling, but if it was simply because they too had experienced a sense of not belonging then it was generally not relevant to a critical response.

A small but significant number of candidates wanted to identify and illustrate how each writer used particular themes and took this approach as a kind of template for their responses, with a paragraph devoted to each. For example the theme of trust (**Question 2**), of friendship (**Question 2**), of love (**Question 3**), of nature (**Question 3**), of nervousness (**Question 1**) etc. A better approach, and a more critically sophisticated one too, would be to discuss what the passage says about trust, friendship and other possible themes, and how these are illustrated and developed. It is unlikely that any writer will have set out quite deliberately to write about particular themes and made what they write fit these ideas.

One rather strange but quite common error lay in candidates saying that a piece was written in the second person narrative, which is certainly not the case in any of the three passages or poem here; the second person is “you”. **Question 1** uses the third person, **Question 2** the first person, and **Question 3** a mixture of third and first.

All candidates responded to two questions, though some responses were clearly incomplete; stopping very abruptly or covering only part of the passage or poem. Timing is very important, as no matter how good an unfinished answer may be, examiners cannot offer marks for what is not there, even when it might theoretically be as good as what is actually completed. Handwriting was mostly clear, but candidates must remember that what they write has to be read by examiners, who will take enormous care to read as much as they can, but if it becomes seriously difficult or even impossible to read then marks may inevitably suffer.

Comments on Specific Questions

1 The First Party, Attia Hosain

This was the most frequently answered question on the paper and it led to some perceptive responses that employed good analytical skills to explore a variety of ideas. Most correctly identified the third person narrative approach here and often were able to link this to enabling the writer to convey, in detail, the feelings of the woman at the centre of the narrative. There were some interesting comments suggesting that because the whole episode is seen through the eyes of an objective narrator we are to some extent guided by the writer to view each character more objectively than we might if it had been written from a first person viewpoint. Linked to this is the fact that none of the characters is given a name; this makes the husband, the tall woman and the fat man slightly shadowy and perhaps even slightly ominous characters. The young wife herself is identified primarily by her changing feelings, rather than by any other feature; though her clothing does play an important role in this respect. The contrast between the dimness of the veranda and the bewildering brightness of the room was often commented on with some candidates going on to develop points about the symbolic importance of this opening. Some linked this to the significance of the ‘stumble’ and the ‘nervousness and panic’ of the wife. Many candidates were sensitive to the feelings of the wife, the idea that English was not her first language and that she had recently married a man who was a fluent English speaker. Some candidates discussed the possibility of this being an arranged marriage, or between an Indian woman and a European man, though these are not established facts in the passage.

The passage contained several references signalling the wife’s unease and nervousness at having to interact with strange people in a situation that she was unfamiliar with. Some saw the symbolic potential in her ‘*sitting on the edge of a big chair*’, and the effects of phrases such as ‘*shoulders drooping*’, and ‘*nervously pulling...*’. The weight of her heavy sari was often and surely correctly seen as metaphorically illustrative of the weight that she felt of her culture and its significance, contrasting so strongly with that of the other characters and perhaps preventing her from feeling at ease in their company.

The relationship between the wife and her new husband produced a range of interesting points with some candidates seeing him as supportive and reassuring: ‘*Her husband was already steadying her*’ and ‘*her husband came and stood by her*’. Others though, saw him as controlling and insensitive to her feelings in this situation: ‘*by the pressure of his hand*’ and ‘*She’ll soon get over it*’. Candidates who took this view also sometimes pointed to the wife’s feeling that her husband and the tall woman were talking about her and commented on his lack of concern about the patronising descriptions of her such as ‘*shy little thing...*’.

Many candidates were also aware of the potential the extract provided to explore issues around the clash of cultures often seeing this as an 'East' meets 'West' situation. The contrast between the wife and the 'tall woman' and the description and effects created by the imagery to do with their nails and ideas about 'dress' were often at the centre of such discussion. Some perceptive candidates also detected the shift in the wife's attitude towards the end of the extract as '*her discomfort changed to uneasy defiance.*'

A few candidates found some difficulty in identifying the characters, with more than a few suggesting that the fat man was the husband, a reminder of the importance of doing what bullet point 1 above says.

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Slightly less popular than **Question 1**, this passage nonetheless attracted a large number of responses, often very perceptive and critically thoughtful. Almost all commented on the striking opening sentence, immediately setting up an atmosphere of tension and uncertainty, which lasts throughout the whole passage; the expression "*in media res*" was used by several candidates, suggesting how the writer throws us straight into the situation, and perhaps foreshadowing the lack of clarity which pervades the presentation of Ben and his nervousness. Ben's brief and often unfinished sentences on the telephone clearly indicate a worried, even panicked mood, particularly when he ends the conversation so suddenly. Many noted that he is ringing "*from the station*"; but there is no evidence at all to suggest that this is a police station, particularly as the narrator assumes that it must be a train station, and certainly it is not in any way at all proof of Ben's criminal past, as quite a number of candidates insisted. In the words of one examiner, "*Ben was deemed likely to be an unreliable criminal by some, again suggesting the need for more careful and considered reading of the extract.*"

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Most candidates noted that the poem consists of only five sentences and that there is no regular metrical pattern, and certainly no rhyme scheme. These points are undeniable, and in a way not worthy of much discussion; though there were some quite thoughtful suggestions as to why these features might be relevant to any discussion. The significant point however, as mentioned by many, is the slow movement of the first long sentence, stretched over seven of the poem’s 16 lines (having 16 lines, incidentally, and no rhyme, means that it is certainly not a sonnet). This sentence, with prolonged descriptions of Alleyne, mirrors the slow deliberation with which he eats. It takes five or six lines before he starts to eat, then line 7 (“*and slowly eat his mangoes....*”) contains some strikingly slow language and images, noted and discussed by almost all candidates. The fact that the word “seed” is dropped onto its own line perhaps illustrates and echoes the fact that Alleyne eats every last morsel, such is his enjoyment of the fruit. The earlier lines establish a sense of calm, warm, restful quiet; Sunday afternoons are, as again almost all candidates said, traditionally a time of relaxation and the natural background that is presented by the poet adds to the sense of rich and fruitful completion.

Line 9 (“*His felt hat....*”) opens with this brief description – the only moment where Alleyne is actually described – then returns to his slow and thoroughly restful eating; line 12 (“*him eating slowly....*”) like line 7 suggests Alleyne’s peaceful and unselfconscious manner. The unexpected and syntactically unusual conclusion to this sentence in the words “*I remember*” brings the speaker suddenly into focus, and the poem shifts quite markedly. The speaker watches Alleyne, reading him metaphorically in the same way as he would read the book he is holding and over which he is looking.

The last four words of the poem are very striking, and led to some interesting thoughts from many candidates. Are they simply casual, suggesting that the memory is in fact unimportant? Are they significantly nostalgic? Are they suggestive of a longing to return to the simplicity of the life the speaker recalls? Do they imply any kind of love between the two characters? Does Alleyne even know that he is being watched? There can obviously be no answer for us to these questions, but candidates who ignored the words missed what is clearly a significant conclusion to the poem. An asserted interpretation was not always helpful, but those who made suggestions linked firmly to what the poem actually says, often demonstrated some sensitivity to the poet and his writing.