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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/12
Drama and Poetry

Key messages

- Candidates should ensure essays have a clear and appropriate structure by careful planning of their response before writing the essay itself.
- Option **(b)** passage questions may usefully place the passage in the wider text as a relevant context.

General comments

The general standard was satisfactory with the large majority of candidates showing at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. There were no rubric errors in this session and very few responses showed evidence of mismanagement of time. The quality of expression was sound in nearly every case, although there are some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level.

There were responses to only some of the texts on the paper, though answers reflecting a wide range of performance were seen on most of the texts attempted by the candidates. The most popular choices were *All My Sons* in ***Section A*** and the selection from *Songs of Ourselves* in ***Section B***.

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

1 Assessment Objective 4 from the Literature in English syllabus states that learners should 'communicate a relevant, structured and supported response'. Many essays would improve the overall success of their essays by having a clear structure. This might be best achieved by more detailed and thoughtful planning, in which the terms of the question are closely considered, before the material to be discussed in the essay is selected. This material can then be shaped into a structured argument, appropriately supported and developed.

2 Appropriate contexts may vary according to the type of question being answered. Often in a passage question, the precise placing of the passage in the wider text can be a useful way of using a textual context. This equally applies to essays on poetry passages, where the appropriate context might be how typical or otherwise the set poem or extract from a poem is of the poet generally, with perhaps brief supporting references to the wider text. Other types of context such as historical or biographical are also very useful, but learners should be encouraged to explore the use of intra-textual contexts as a useful way of showing appropriate knowledge of the whole text.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1 ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

(a) Responses to this question often had a sound knowledge of the text on which to base their arguments. Most essays focused on the relationships, with nearly all essays discussing Joe Keller and Steve Deever and the supporting community around the Keller household, though the 'friendship' of Chris and Ann was also a popular topic. Most candidates saw how Miller shows the 'cost of betraying a friend' in the tragic ending for Joe, but also his family. Others saw the link between 'friendship and family', with better answers exploring the difficulties Miller thereby created for the likes of Chris and Ann 'torn between their duty to their parents and their love for and

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friendship with each other,' as one suggested. Answers which supported arguments by close reference to the text were often at least sound, though only a few responses were able to develop these ideas into a consideration of how Miller presents friendship dramatically.

(b) This was a popular question with over half of the entry choosing this option. Many were able to place the passage into the context of the wider text, with nearly all answers showing at least a sound knowledge and understanding of the significance of the passage. Weaker answers tended either to paraphrase the dialogue or to give a more general summary of the play's action and its characters. Better answers at this level kept the question in mind and were able to focus on the possible audience responses to the dramatically charged scene. More successful answers focused on Miller's dramatic methods throughout – the stage directions, the use of different kinds of dialogue, the language and the movement around the stage. Good answers turned such ideas into a consideration of the structure of the scene and how Miller builds up the tension until the arrival of Keller himself. Very good answers developed such interpretations further, for example, by detailed analysis of some of the details of language and action, noticing for example the 'controlled violence of the exchanges between Chris and his father'. Where such ideas were supported with appropriate contexts the answers often did very well.

Question 2 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Much Ado About Nothing*

(a) Answers to this question often had a sound knowledge of the text and the characters. Nearly every essay referred in detail to the 'tricking of Benedick and then Beatrice,' with better answers able to consider the comedy thereby created. Many answers also noted that deception might also be a 'malevolent thing in the hands of Don John,' as one suggested. When such contrasting ideas were developed into an argument the answers did well. Better answers were able to relate Shakespeare's use of deception to his methods of characterisation and to the structure of the play as a whole, often focusing on the effects created. Where these arguments were supported by specific reference to the text, the answers did very well.

(b) This was the slightly more popular choice on this text. Nearly every answer was able to place the passage in its context, the masked ball, and knew 'why Benedick was so antagonised against Beatrice', at this point. Weaker answers tended to retell the wider 'story' of Benedick and Beatrice, with too little focus on the details of the passage. Answers which explored some of the detail often noted the comedy, though some saw, in Benedick's language a 'genuine hurt at Beatrice's comments'. Good answers explored the ironic undertones of Benedick's words, though some answers thought his words 'were sincere and he really does hate her now'. Very good answers considered Shakespeare's choices here, noting the methods of characterisation and the significance of this scene to the play's overall structure and development.

Question 3 WOLE SOYINKA: *The Trials of Brother Jero and Jero's Metamorphosis*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance.

Question 4 THOMAS MIDDLETON AND WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

(a) There were only a few responses to this question. Nearly every answer was able to discuss the relationship between Beatrice and De Flores in some detail, often showing a sound knowledge and some understanding of the text. Better answers, noticing the 'with this comment in mind', shaped their responses to the given quotation. Many thought that the two were equally guilty, 'destroyed by their desires', as one suggested. Good answers developed their arguments by considering the wider significance of the relationship to the plot and to the key themes of the play. Where such ideas were supported by close reference to the text and with some sense of the wider context, the answers often did very well.

(b) There were too few responses to the **(b)** question on this text to be able to make a general comment on performance.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5 ROBERT BROWNING: *Selected Poems*

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(a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.

(b) This was a relatively popular choice of question in this session. Some answers were able to explore the poem with some knowledge and understanding. Very weak answers, however, were often puzzled by the situation in the poem and appeared to be responding as to an unseen poem, with consequent weaknesses in understanding and the discussion. Answers in the lower levels of assessment often attempted a paraphrase of the poem, with some recognising how the speaker 'looking at the girl and imagining a painter trying to capture her beauty,' as one suggested. Some answers were distracted into considering the relationship between the speaker and the girl. Those who focused on the set poem were more successful, especially where the personal response was linked to the meaning and effects of the poem. Better answers considered some of the details of language and poetic voice and what they revealed about the speaker's attitudes to the girl and thereby Browning's presentation. Some connected this poem to Browning's dramatic monologues and considered poetic techniques broadly. Good answers analysed some of the effects of the language – his use of nature, for example, and biblical references. However all answers would have been improved had they (i) supported their interpretations with appropriate context and specific reference to the set poem and (ii) been able to discuss poetic methods confidently, but those that did explore the verse form and the rhythms often did very well.

Question 6 OWEN SHEERS: *Skirrid Hill*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance.

Question 7 *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2*

This was the most popular text from ***Section B***, with over three quarters of the learners choosing this text, the vast majority of whom tackled the **(b)** essay option.

(a) Nearly every answer was able to select relevant poems to discuss, the most popular choices being *Futility* by Wilfred Owen, *Distant Fields* by Rhian Gallagher and *A Wife in London* by Thomas Hardy. Answers had knowledge of relevant poems but were often limited in understanding of the poetic concerns, so that the required comparison was at best only implicit. Better answers often gave summaries of the selected poems and compared them in terms of content and personal response. Where such responses considered some concerns such as loss, death or the speakers' attitudes, the answers started to become competent. The few better answers explored the poetic methods, often the language and the imagery. Where these points were supported by appropriate reference to the text, an awareness of contexts and a structured argument, the answers did well.

(b) This was by far the most popular **(b)** question from ***Section B*** on the paper. Very weak answers attempting to retell 'the story of the poem,' as one suggested, often struggled to show relevant knowledge, discussing the poem apparently as an unseen and making unconnected points about some poetic aspects of the poem, with little sense of the underlying meaning. Lower level answers tended to paraphrase the poem line by line or offer a general summary with some generally relevant personal response such as 'it is moving to read about someone's loss of love in a relationship,' as one put it. Sounder answers at this level recognised that the speaker (or Wordsworth himself for some) was addressing a specific person. Answers were lifted by knowledge of the context, the changing relationship between Wordsworth and Coleridge, which enabled specific points of meaning to be explored in a more directed and focused way. Competent answers linked such ideas to the poetic methods, often focusing on language and imagery, with many noting the water imagery of the 'fountain becoming a well, which shows how the relationship has changed for the worse,' as one suggested. Good answers developed such ideas into analysis, exploring the effects of 'how the flowing water has now become static' or the imagery of the sparkling relationship turning into a silent obscure one,' as one response stated. Very good answers offered perceptive analysis of the effects of the poetic choices, sensitively interpreting the speaker's 'changing emotions as the situation develops,' as one suggested. Other very good responses saw how the structure of the poem, the verse form and the metre are all used by Wordsworth to shape the reader's response or 'to show Coleridge how much he missed him,' as one put it.

Question 8 GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

(a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.

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(b) There were very few responses to this question. Weak answers tended to summarise the poem, showing some knowledge, but often very limited understanding of Clarke's concerns. Better answers had some personal response to the poem, such as 'the reader feels sympathy for the child's situation in this dysfunctional family,' as one response put it. Sounder answers were aware of Clarke's concerns, such as the order and control in the family, the lack of empathy or genuine love and Clarke's 'habitual sense of otherness or being different,' as one suggested. Good responses linked these thoughts to Clarke's methods, particularly her use of language to suggest the coldness of relationships and the lack of love, with in some cases, well-integrated contextual pointing to support their arguments.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/22
Prose and Unseen

Key messages

- Responses which rely on summary of the content of texts or extracts are not successful.
- Successful responses focus on the writing of the texts and how the writer communicates the meaning and content.
- Successful responses use analysis of specific references and quotations to support points in essays. This should be particularly remembered for the **(a)** questions, where candidates select their own references to answer the question.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions analyse the writing of the selected extract in great detail.
- In the Unseen, successful responses show how the literary features communicate the meaning and contribute to the reader's understanding of the passage or poem.

General comments

Candidates wrote responses to questions on all of the texts, though there were very few responses to the questions on *Petals of Blood*. Most candidates showed knowledge of the subject matter of the texts, and many were competent in exploring ways in which the writers communicate their concerns through choices of language, form and structure. Candidates are advised to have a clear sense of direction in their essays, supported by a firm focus on the writing of the texts. This is particularly true of the **(a)** questions, where candidates would be more successful with some analysis of specific episodes from the texts.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Prose

Question 1 IAN MCEWAN: *Atonement*

(a) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

(b) Most essays in response to this question took note of the various objects on Robbie's desk and in his room, noting that he has wide interests, but seldom developed those observations into comments on ways in which McEwan characterises him. The passage presented opportunities to discuss McEwan's presentation of Robbie as a young man with both artistic and scientific leanings, with references to his poetry and his performance in *Twelfth Night*, for example, as well as the signs of his medical studies. McEwan draws the two aspects together by describing Robbie's drawing of 'the bones of the hand'. His favoured position within the Tallis family is also made clear by the gift of the typewriter and Leon's speech at a party given for his twenty-first birthday. His patronage by the Tallises might have been linked to the portrayal of the photograph of his parents, which identifies Robbie as the son of servants, as well as establishing the bond between Robbie and his mother because of his father's disappearance. Candidates who were confident with the text might have been able to comment on Robbie's emotional turmoil at this point in the novel, indicated by the end of the first paragraph and 'Another pathetic hope.' They might also have commented on the irony of the end of the extract, noting Jack Tallis' agreement to 'help with fees at medical school' – despite the 'application forms', events of the novel mean that Robbie will never pursue that dream. It is important for candidates to go beyond noting the content of the passage; they need to consider its significance and, in this instance, consider how the details present the character to the reader.

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Question 2 NGŨGĨ WA THIONG'O: *Petals of Blood*

(a) There were very few responses to this question, but in those answers seen by examiners, there were appropriate observations of Ilmorog's change from a drought-stricken rural community to a developed urban centre. Candidates were also able to demonstrate Ngũgĩ's critical view of these changes; while roads and buildings are built, the novel highlights the exploitation of the population of Ilmorog and the people's separation from the new wealth. Candidates were able to discuss the corruption in the capitalism which drives the development of the new town.

(b) There were too few responses to this question to make a general comment appropriate.

Question 3 *Stories of Ourselves, Volume 2*

(a) There was a small number of responses to this question. Candidates chose to discuss appropriate stories, which included Edith Wharton's *The Lady's Maid's Bell*, Saki's *Gabriel-Ernest*, M R James' *A Warning to the Curious* and Marghanita Laski's *The Tower*. The types of horror are different in each story and the more successful answers considered not just those differences but also how the writers create the differences, as required by the question. There was, for example, discussion of the use of gothic ideas in the Wharton story and ways in which Saki develops hints about the strange boy in the woods before the end of the story confirms his identity. There was some interesting awareness of James' use of multiple narrators, while Caroline's perspective as she climbs the tower was discussed and linked to issues of gender. These essays had a solid basis of knowledge of the stories and candidates would improve their responses with greater awareness of the authors' techniques.

(b) Most answers on the short stories were responses to this question on a passage from Edith Wharton's *The Lady's Maid's Bell*. A number of candidates worked diligently through the passage, noting the narrator's illness, her situation, Mrs Railton's help and her arrival at the Brympton house. Such answers were often close to summary; for greater success, candidates needed to look more closely at some of the implications of these aspects of the passage, considering how they define the character of the narrator. More subtle answers could also look at Hartley's role as a narrator. Wharton presents a narrator who is open and honest about her own vulnerabilities at the beginning of the story, revealing her ill-health, her poverty and her recent immigration to the USA. Key adjectives are used, such as 'weak and tottery', to indicate her physical state, while her pessimism is shown in a phrase such as 'I didn't see why my luck should ever turn.' As some candidates pointed out, these suggestions of Hartley's psychological frailty could inform the reader's interpretation of her experiences with Emma Saxton. As narrator, Hartley is also proleptic, with the comment about her luck changing: 'It did though – or I thought so at the time.' Some candidates also picked up the notes of warning in Mrs Railton's otherwise enthusiastic endorsement of the offered position, which are also aspects of Hartley's foreshadowing. There are also indications of Hartley's bravery, apparent in dialogue – 'I'm not afraid of solitude' – and her immediate departure for Brympton Place. A number of candidates noted Hartley's use of gothic tropes in her description of the house and grounds, and also her determination to see the best of the house, concentrating on things being done 'handsomely' rather than the 'thickets of tall black-looking shrubs' outside.

Question 4 MARK TWAIN: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

(a) There were a very few responses to this question. Essays tended to focus on the importance of the river journey, rather than the river itself, though the two are clearly connected. A small number of answers looked at Huck's affinity to the river, which at some points in the novel is presented as a location of peaceful escape, but at other points presents considerable dangers. They also considered the way the river leads Huck and Jim to various key locations along its banks. The idea of the river as a place separate from society, and potential metaphoric readings, tended to be overlooked.

(b) In writing about Huck's relationship with his father as it is presented in the selected extract, candidates recognised Pap's irresponsibility and his violence, selecting key examples from the text. Essays were less successful in focusing clearly on how Twain presents the relationship through Huck's narrative voice. Some, however, commented that Huck presents the relationship as a normal one, using violent language such as 'thrashed' and 'cowhiding' without recognising the brutality. Instead, he presents it as commonplace: 'I was used to being where I was, and liked it'. He even describes his life as 'lazy and jolly'. In this way Twain suggests that Huck finds life with Pap, violent though it is, preferable to his life with Miss Watson, enjoying his leisure and bearing

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the violence until it goes too far and Pap is 'too handy with his hick'ry' and Huck is 'all over welts', signalling the physical manifestations of abuse. Candidates also commented on Pap's drinking, though a small number of candidates thought that Huck deliberately borrowed 'two or three dollars' so that his father would be drunk and jailed, suggesting a level of manipulativeness in Huck's behaviour that Twain's text does not support.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 Drama

Fewer candidates chose to respond to the drama extract, but most who did so had a ready recognition of the situation between the characters and a sound sense of the scene's dramatic development. Essays demonstrated a clear understanding of the situation between the three characters, though some candidates interpreted the description '*wasted*' in its contemporary sense and believed the Soldier to be drunk, rather than suffering from the deprivations of warfare. Thoughtful answers noted the uneasiness in the stage directions for the Girl, who '*stands rigid*' and then '*does not move*', contrasting with the Soldier's friendly greeting and creating suspense in her lukewarm responses until the appearance of the Man. Strong answers also noted the way the stage directions indicate his aggression, with his '*swift movement*' and his '*half-drawn … knife*', a clear contrast with the attitudes of the Soldier. Some candidates discussed the implications of the attitudes of the two men towards the Girl, noting that the Soldier gives her choice – 'which of us will you 'ave?' – whereas the Man 'only want[s] what [he] can take' and wants to fight for her as a possession he can win. Answers generally might have looked more at the Soldier's longer speech ll.10-16 with the romantic memories and rhetorical celebration of the end of his army life. There might too have been more comments on the colloquial phrasing of the dialogue in the drama, suggesting the casual speech of relatively uneducated young people. A rural area is also indicated by the '*hedge*' and '*stile*' as well as the Soldier's memory of the 'night in the wood'.

Question 6 Prose

There were more answers on the prose passage and it was clear in several that candidates had begun to write before they had read and thought about the whole piece, as they had to change direction when they reached the reference to the card game and the explanatory footnote. It is very important that candidates read the unseen extract in its entirety before they begin to write, so that they have a clear idea of its development and structure. Candidates who had read and thought about the whole passage were able to frame their answer based on the recognition that the passage is a monologue from a wife about her husband, while the couple are playing cards with another couple who are their friends. This understanding was very helpful in grasping the attitude of the wife and empathising with the likely responses of Tom, her husband, though he is silent throughout. Most candidates noted that while the wife claims that she and her husband 'feel just the same about everything', her statement is undermined by her list of complaints and the changes she has made to Tom's habits and behaviour. Some did comment, however, that all the changes have to be made by Tom while the wife seems to make no adaptations at all. There is also the suggestion of ignorance, as 'Humoresque' and 'Indian Love Lyrics' are not the height of 'serious, classical things' and '*The Fool* or *Lightnin"* might not be universally considered 'something worth while'. While some saw evidence of a happy, loving and adapting couple, more recognised that the tone of the dialogue indicates a domineering and controlling wife, who disapproves of small aspects of her husband's taste, like music and theatre, through more significant areas such as his chosen breakfast, to openly discussing more intimate aspects of his behaviour, such as his chosen nightwear, even 'threaten[ing] to leave him if he didn't buy pajamas.' Few picked out the text's indication of Tom's embarrassment and anger in her comment: 'And now he's mad at me for telling'. The revelations about Tom's writing are similar, as it becomes apparent that she has found his writings while going through his private papers and has not even discussed them with him at all before discussing them publicly with their friends. As she says: 'You didn't know I found it, did you, Tommie?' In her apparent support for his writing endeavours, she only undermines him by telling their friends that his work has been consistently rejected. Careful and empathetic readings of the passage were able to show how the wife is insensitive at best, a bully at worst, and that even her use of the diminutive 'Tommie' is demeaning, adding to his humiliation through her speech.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/32
Shakespeare and Drama

Key messages

- Quality of insight and selectivity does better than writing at length.
- In **(b)** questions, the passage printed *must* be the central focus. A line-by-line, rather than strategic, going through of the passage is not a productive way to deal with these questions.
- Contexts, when used, need to be integrated and help the candidates move forward their own arguments.

General comments

When a paper has a very small entry of candidates, there are obviously some texts and questions that are much more popular than others. The examples used in this report have – intentionally – been taken from the most popular responses, though they are, of course, illustrative of other answers too.

In general, examiners noted that candidates seemed better prepared this year. However, some candidates obviously felt that they needed to write at great length in order to get their points across. Whilst there is no maximum (or minimum) length for answers, very long responses tend to be self-penalising because they lack the ability to select what is truly relevant.

Most candidates chose to do **(b)** questions. Having made this decision – which perhaps they viewed as a more secure option because there is ready source of quotation already printed – less satisfactory answers often failed to show a grasp of the whole play or failed to discuss the language and action of the passage in a sufficiently analytical way.

With **(a)** questions, candidates have the advantage of being able to scope out the answer in their own ways. There is never an ideal answer in an examiner's mind, so the quality of the examples adduced, and the coherence and development of a consistent argument is central. Candidates need to be aware that a good answer does not need to cover all possibilities or deal with all possible aspects of the question. The skill lies in choosing aspects of the question that are central and supporting a case. One difficulty is that candidates often want to range across the whole play. This encourages narration, which is not highly rewarded. Candidates are better off choosing a few key moments and exploring them in detail with reference to both language and action. Responses that contain no quotations and no specifics simply cannot rise toward the top end of the mark scheme, no matter how good a candidate's general knowledge of the play as a whole.

With **(b)** questions, the passage printed must be the central focus of the response. Candidates need to be careful to deal with the precise demands of the question. And for this reason, a line-by-line approach is not appropriate. For example, with **Question 1(b)** on *The Merchant of Venice*, the paper printed two scenes from the play. Some candidates simply worked through the first and then turned their attention to the second. A strategic view would have been much more useful. The scenes offer contrast of place and character, values and attitudes towards money/love and many of the other themes of the play. In short, these scenes offered a microcosm of the action. The best candidates saw this and were able to use detailed analysis of the action in the passage to reach across the play as a whole and talk about Shakespeare's dramatic techniques and his methods for embodying his themes in action. It follows, therefore, that candidates must be prepared to deal with the whole of the passage printed and use details from it in order to illustrate bigger aspects of the play as a whole. Another example of this came with responses to **2(b)** on *King Lear* where candidates elaborated lengthily on the first elements of the scene but never got to the moment of contrast at line 55 where Lear offers a more inward view of himself and the action thus far, whilst also using some of the metaphors which infuse the text as a whole. The best candidates, of course, pointed out that Lear is still a long way from self-knowledge in this speech.

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The issue of contexts is worthy of brief exploration. Contexts form part of the mark scheme, but they must be used with caution. The relationship between an author and the achieved work of art is rarely – if ever – relevant. Rather, contexts should be considered in relation to the historical or sociological background of the text, or in terms of how the text might be realised in performance in the modern theatre. Thus, in answers to **5(b)** on *Indian Ink* candidates were able to see that the passage which moves backwards and forwards between the 1930s and the 1980s offers two perspectives on the British Empire. But the point is that the context in this case emerges from the texture of the play, rather than being pushed upon it from a feeling of obligation to include background material. Contextual material should *always* be used in this way. Similarly, there is no point in simply discussing the role of fools in Renaissance courts, unless the point is made that the fool in the passage from *King Lear* is subverting natural order and respect for kings at this point to demonstrate something fundamental about the topsy-turvy world of the play as a whole.

The business of evaluating others' opinions remains problematic for some candidates. At this level, it is expected that candidates will be introduced to literary criticism and that they will be aware that different readers, audiences or producers might offer profoundly diverse views of a text. At its most fundamental, a candidate can simply produce a range of possibilities: 'At this point Goneril is behaving with immature spite towards her father; however, his behaviour towards her might be seen as rational because....' This sets up alternative possibilities and is therefore a means of fulfilling the objective without having to name critics or quote from them. At a more sophisticated level, however, a critic might be evoked as a means of the candidate furthering an argument either by developing the insight further or by disagreeing with it. The most important thing is that others' views are invoked *and used* by candidates, rather than simply being mentioned. As the mark scheme says, the critics should be mentioned (Level 4 and upwards) 'to support a sound argument to the question, with support from the text.' 'With support from the text' should be taken seriously. Simply asserting that some eminent critic thinks something is not enough: candidates need to show why the critic's view might be taken seriously – or dismissed – by demonstrating how the view might be supported from a close reading of the text under consideration. With a dramatic text, reference to particular treatments in actual productions (or films) can always be used if relevant to a candidate's arguments.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/42
Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- When referring to techniques related to writers' effects, candidates should give specific examples and explore them in the context of the question.
- The selection of relevant material, and use of a strategic approach to compose an answer, is better than writing at great length.
- When responding to **(b)** questions, although the key focus should be the extract given, it is important to ensure that the wider text is referenced in the answer.

General comments

Candidates generally responded to the paper with enthusiasm and interest. Encouragingly, problems with rubric infringements were not seen this series as centres and candidates have become more familiar with the requirements of the specification. Candidates tended to be well prepared and knowledgeable about the texts studied and their approach to these reflected close reading and understanding of themes and characters. Most candidates this series chose the **(b)** question on the text studied. It is vital that candidates understand the genre of the text they are writing about and its key features. Referring to a poem as having paragraphs or a novel as having an audience reflects a lack of awareness and knowledge of basic details.

There was evidence in many answers of careful planning and relevant discussion with the question clearly in view. However, some candidates wrote at great length, losing the sharpness of their argument as a result. This approach of writing a great deal leads in many cases to loss of the question and strategic direction. It can also result in candidates spending insufficient time on their second answer or becoming descriptive rather than analytical. One candidate responding to **Question 4(b)** on Emily Dickinson's *A Bird came down the Walk* – worked through every part of the poem to the point where the focus of the question was effectively lost and it became a general analysis.

Candidates choosing the **(a)** question for a text are most successful when they make focused plans that respond to the terms of the question. The best answers use specific examples and key moments to support their arguments and include relevant analysis of the writer's effects and how these relate to the question. Answers working around Level 4 tended to use key moments from texts to exemplify relevant ideas. An example of this is one answer to **5(a)** (*Paradise Lost*) that required candidates to write about love. Exploration of Adam's devotion to God transcending his love of Eve were illustrated with reference to Eve eating the forbidden fruit and her suggestion to divide the labours. The least successful approach to **(a)** questions is to try to cover the entire text; this tends to attract narration or a descriptive approach which does not attract high marks. Apt and relevant use of quotation is essential to performing well on both **(a)** and **(b)** questions; the least successful answers sometimes contain none.

Candidates choosing the **(b)** question for a text should be careful to check the nature and context of the passage or poem given. The focus of the question is also important, and it is sometimes the case that candidates write a general response to the passage rather than a specific answer to the question. The best answers write specific and strategically planned answers that consider the wider text or body of work with relevance. An example of this could be seen in a response to **4(b)**, Emily Dickinson's poem, *A Bird came down the Walk* –. The candidate developed a relevant and lucid discussion of the poem and how effects created an impression of nature that acknowledged its duality and contrasts. This answer was well-supported and crucially drew in references to other works by Dickinson, including *A narrow Fellow in the Grass* with relevance and supporting explanation. In another successful answer on **7(b)**, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the candidate explored selected aspects of the passage in detail, reflecting on implications related to the wider novel. Less successful answers tend to work through the extract or poem in a methodical or linear way, sometimes being drawn into narration or paraphrase approaches.

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Analysis is an important factor in determining the success of an answer. There should be evidence of relevant analysis of aspects of form, structure and language in all answers, whether **(a)** or **(b)**. Analysis should be linked to the question rather than an 'add on' to arguments presented. Examples of unsuccessful reference to technical features include explanation of the mechanics of Dickinson's rhyme scheme without commenting on its effect, and unsupported lists of features that have been seen in the poem, for example, 'This poem contains alliteration, personification, and metaphors'. Similarly, 'feature spotting' should be avoided. Where analysis is superficial or arbitrary, answers cannot reach the higher levels of the mark scheme. The best analysis seen is critical, specific, well explained and utilised to support the arguments being made. Some very good examples of analysis were seen including reference to Atwood's non-linear narrative, contributing to not only characterisation of Offred but a view of Gilead as a totalitarian state. Another effective reference to the patterns of sibilance in *A Bird came down the Walk* – contributed to a point about Dickinson's contrasts and contradictions in her poetry.

Personal engagement was a strength of many answers, candidates engage independently and often originally with the texts. Examiners commented on some of the interesting ideas and arguments offered in many responses. For example, some ideas in question **12(b)** about Septimus related with sensitivity to Virginia Woolf's presentation of his relationships and past experiences. Personal engagement is often successful when it is linked to other opinions as this creates a natural point of view from which coherent and thoughtful arguments develop.

The 'O' element of the mark scheme remains an area of contention for some candidates who find evaluating the opinions of others challenging. Candidates should be introduced to a range of literary criticism as part of their study and where this is done effectively, comments support relevant discussion and offer additional perspectives that are both insightful and pertinent. Candidates who were able to demonstrate awareness of the existence of varying opinions tended to be able to explore a range of textual features, characters and ideas in greater depth. A candidate can use a critical comment to launch an argument, for example in **2(b)**, 'As mentioned by critic Woods, romance serves as an agent for moral enlightenment'. Name-dropping critics without relevant arguments and links to the question are unhelpful and detract from consistent development of ideas. Some candidates do not mention the possibility of varying opinions at all, and this certainly compromises achievement. At its most basic, answers can refer to the existence of alternative interpretations, for example, '…on one hand, Adam can be seen as a weak character in Milton's presentation of his actions, however he can also be viewed as strong in other parts of the poem'. Support from the text is vital when referring to the views of critics. Without supporting textual reference it becomes assertion.

Contextual detail was included with greater relevance than in previous series. Many were better integrated and linked to specific details. Reference to literary context in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and how this relates to her prose style was used with relevance in some answers. Reference to concepts of dystopia and patriarchal society were well linked to Atwood's concerns in answers working at Level 4 and above. Context in relation to Dickinson seems to be an obstacle for some candidates who try to shoehorn details relating to graveyards and mental health into arguments relating to nature. Details relating to context should form part of the planning process and relate closely to the question and arguments put forward.

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