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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/12
Drama and Poetry

Key messages

- Learners should avoid 'feature-spotting' at the expense of analysis in their essays.
- Learners should integrate appropriate contextual support into their arguments.

General comments

There were responses seen at every level of the mark scheme to most of the texts on the paper. The large majority of learners showed evidence of appropriate preparation, with at least a sound basic knowledge of their two texts. Many learners had evidently worked hard to acquire their knowledge and understanding of the texts and these learners were always able to select relevant material to address the given tasks. There were very few rubric errors in this session, but it is important that learners understand the optionality on the paper if they are to achieve the best mark possible. The quality of the expression was generally appropriate to the task, with some excellent examples of essay writing seen. Some learners, on the other hand, are at times disadvantaged by a lack of clarity in their writing.

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

1 There were a number of learners in this session who used a list of literary terms as a way of structuring their response, particularly on **(b)** questions on poetry. This can be a useful way of approaching the text but learners should also remember that these terms are not in and of themselves 'analysis' of the text. However, there were many occasions when a term such as 'asyndeton' or 'metonymy' was followed by an example from the text without any other comment, so that it seemed the learner was 'feature-spotting' rather than analysing the effects of the writer's choices. Learners should always have the effects of the writing, especially in passage questions, as the main focus of their essay.

2 There is a requirement for learners to show some awareness of appropriate contexts for their chosen set texts. In **(b)** passage questions this context might be precise references to some aspects of the wider text. In **(a)** questions it might be some relevant biographical or historical context, which helps the learner to show understanding of their text in terms of the given question. Whatever approach is taken, the learner does need to ensure that the given contexts are both relevant to and supportive of their interpretation or argument.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

THOMAS MIDDLETON AND WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

(a) There were only a few responses to this question. Nearly every answer was able to find relevant material to address the task, with all responses focusing on Beatrice and, particularly De Flores and his 'unquenchable desire for his mistress,' as one put it. Answers often showed a sound knowledge and some understanding of the text. Better answers focused on the effects of 'lust and desire' nearly always in terms of character development, with some remembering how Diaphanta's desire led to her murder by De Flores. Only a few answers made reference to the sub-plot in the madhouse but these answers were able to show how lust and desire had a 'literally transforming effect on Isabella's would-be lovers,' as one suggested. Good answers developed their arguments

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by considering the wider significance of desire to the development of the plot. 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.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was a popular choice of text with a relatively even split between the two options.

(a) Nearly every answer to this question had a sound knowledge of the text and was able to select relevant material to address the task. Weaker answers summarised the events of the play in which the Duke was involved, often in great detail. Better answers at this level were aware of his role as an 'organiser, albeit a disguised one,' as one suggested. More competent answers had greater understanding of some of the complexities of Shakespeare's portrayal of the Duke, who for some learners was 'the instigator of the 'problems' the play is famous for,' as one put it. Other answers explored his moral ambiguity, with many noting 'Lucio's comments as a counterbalance to the more positive aspects of his character,' as one essay suggested. Good answers were able to discuss in detail some of Shakespeare's dramatic methods: the use of irony, the contrasting language of Lucio and Isabella and the attitudes to justice, crime and punishment from the 'wide spectrum of Viennese society,'. Where such discussions were supported by detailed reference to the text and some awareness of relevant contexts, 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 first appearance of Isabella. Weaker answers tended to retell the wider 'story' of Isabella and Claudio, with too little focus on the details of the passage. Better answers at this level did consider some of the detail with some answers noticing the contrasting language of Isabella and Lucio, for example. Others, taking good notice of the question, saw how Isabella might 'reflect the audience's attitudes to Claudio's 'so-called' crime, so that from the start the audience sees her as a sympathetic character,' as one learner stated. Better answers explored, for example, the description of Angelo, and how this might seem 'accurate and sound to the audience,' as one said. Other answers wondered about Isabella's 'religious situation and whether she would be able to argue Claudio's case,'. Good answers explored the ironic undertones of both Lucio and Isabella's words though, for some learners, 'few people in the audience would predict how Angelo would fall for her,' as one put it. 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 insufficient responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular text from **Section B**. With over half of all learners choosing this text, the vast majority tackled the **(b)** passage option.

(a) Nearly all learners were able to select relevant material with which to address the question, often showing detailed and accurate knowledge of the text. Popular discussion points were Maggie's jealousy of Brick's relationship with Skipper, (with some also exploring Skipper's feelings about Brick as a contrasting form of jealousy), Mae and Gooper's jealousy of Brick's position as Big Daddy's favourite, (with Maggie's jealousy of their many children as a counterbalance) and the general jealousy of Big Daddy's wealth. Weaker answers tended to summarise each of these situations, though better answers at that level showed some understanding of Williams's methods of characterisation and how he used jealousy to develop the audience responses. More competent answers distinguished the different kinds of jealousy and their effects, often with supporting

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references to the text. Where such references were analysed in terms of language and tone, the answers often did well. Essays which were able to develop beyond the effects of jealousy on the characters into considering Williams's wider concerns often did very well, especially where the ideas were underpinned by precise references to the text and a clear appreciation of relevant contexts.

(b) This was the second most popular question on the paper, chosen by just over half of the entry. Nearly all learners were able to find relevant points to make about Maggie from the passage, though weaker answers tended to retell her entire history, particularly with Brick and Skipper. Most learners were also able to place the passage in its context, enabling a more focused discussion on the significance of this passage to the audience's response to Maggie here and more generally as the play unfolds. More competent answers were alive to the changing tone and mood, from her 'almost childish response to Big Mama's accusation, her defensive attitude with Brick leading to her attempts to arouse his interest in her,' as one summarised it. Better answers looked carefully at Williams's dramatic methods, including the 'carefully worded stage directions, dictating how Maggie must be performed,' as one noted. Other good answers looked closely at the language, often analysing Maggie's strategies for arousing Brick's interest, her 'careful description of how other men look at her, including Sonny Boy,' as one put it. Others noted the sexual language of 'forcing, lech, lover, kept my figure, as all indicative of Maggie's inner fragility.' Her relationship with Brick was much discussed – her need for his approval, for 'him to want her. Which seems to be more than just a response to being childless but a genuine need to be desired,' as one suggested. Others noted the action – the use of the mirror, Big Mama's door slam and Brick's movement to the liquor cabinet, for example – with some very good answers analysing how, through the words and actions, Williams creates the audience response to Maggie. Where such arguments were supported by relevant contexts, which were often precise references to the wider text, the answers did very well.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

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

Question 6

ROBERT BROWNING: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice in this session, though still quite popular with almost a quarter of the entry choosing it. The vast majority opted for the **(b)** passage question.

(a) There were very few essays seen on this question. Nearly every learner was able to select relevant poems with which to address the task, the most popular choices being *The Laboratory, Porphyria's Lover* and *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister,* though one or two did use the poem from the **(b)** passage question, thus limiting the depth of knowledge that they were able to evidence. Most essays agreed that the 'stories were the most important part of Browning's poems,' as one said, though some learners did argue that emotions were always present, 'the anger and hatred of the scorned lover in *The Laboratory* as well as the bitter jealousy of the monk in the Spanish Cloister,' as one argued. Few, though, were able to explore Browning's narrative techniques with any confidence and the essays were often limited to a retelling of the events of the poems with occasional comments on the emotions that the poems might reveal. Any better answers did look closely at Browning's methods, with some awareness shown of his choices of language, such as the poisoning images in *The Laboratory*, or an appreciation of his versification, for example, the rhythm and rhymes in *'How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix'.* However, essays generally lacked sufficient development of the arguments and detailed reference to the text to be able to progress very far in the levels of assessment.

(b) This was a popular choice and most learners had at least a basic knowledge of the poem, with some awareness of relevant contexts, such as Browning's other dramatic monologues. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the poem, often in sound detail, with better answers at this level revealing some appreciation of Browning's ability to 'give the reader a vivid picture of the duke and his attitudes to his name and his wife,' as one put it. More competent answers focused on some of

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the details – the speaker's 'pride in his possessions, his arrogance and his misogyny,' as one suggested. Other sound answers analysed some of the language in detail, such as 'stoop and stooping, which tells the reader so much about the Duke's pride and belief in his own superiority,' as one said. Good answers were alive to the nuances of the speaker's words – 'his commands and then the smiles stopped suggests foul play,' as one summarised it. Other good answers developed the analysis looking closely at the 'indirect dialogue and how the supposed reactions of the hearer tell the reader a lot about the speaker,' as one said. Other very good answers considered the verse form, the use of rhymes and 'how the rhythms of the poem are as weighty and powerful as the speaker himself,' according to one learner. Where these points were supported by precise reference to the text and appropriate quotation, the answers did very well.

Question 7

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

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

(b) This was a minority choice, with answers seen across the full range of assessment. Weak answers tended to summarise the poem, showing some knowledge, but often very limited understanding of Clarke's concerns. There were some misreadings seen, principally that the 'cat' and 'Dylan' were one and the same. Better answers at this level did explore the effect of the cat's death on the family 'and the world in which the family lives,' as one put it. Other basic answers often had a personal response to the poem, triggered by the learner's own experience of loss. More competent answers considered some of Clarke's poetic choices – most usually the verse form and the language, which 'is often about death or its effects – blood, graves, mourners, nightmare – and so presents the cat's death as a tragedy,' as one learner summarised it. Good answers developed the analysis, noting the 'interplay between the animals and the human family, where the mourners are cats and humans, but with the closest connection between the child and the animals,' as one said. Good answers often explored the way Clarke uses the natural world to develop her concerns, with other answers exploring her use of colours and pronouns to good effect. Overall, answers were less secure talking about poetic methods such as rhythm and form, though where these were addressed, particularly with precise references to the poem, the answers often did very well.

Question 8

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 tackled the **(b)** essay option.

(a) There were very few answers to this question. Popular choices of relevant poems were *The Road, A Long Journey, The Stars Go Over the Lonely Ocean* and *Father Returning Home.* Most answers had knowledge of relevant poems but were often limited in understanding of the poetic concerns, which in turn limited the depth of discussion offered. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase their chosen poems, often accurately and clearly. Better answers were aware that the poets might have different concerns and use 'journeys to represent in a poetic way important changes in life or even death,' as one put it. More competent answers considered the word 'explore' more closely and often argued that 'journeys are nearly always metaphorical in poetry,' as one said, with some interesting arguments about the poetic concerns which were thus explored. Good answers looked more closely at poetic methods, particularly language and imagery, with some good analysis seen, often supported by precise quotation from the poems and, at times, by appropriate contextual references.

(b) This was by far the most popular question on the paper, with almost two thirds of the entry offering it. Very weak answers often struggled to show relevant knowledge, discussing the poem apparently as an unseen and making unconnected points about some of its poetic aspects, 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. For example: 'such descriptions of the hardships of the poor are upsetting for the reader,' as one commented. Sounder answers at this level, noting the question, did consider the effects of poverty in detail often listing 'the starvation, the cold, the illnesses and the lack of hope even if you get to be old,' as one summarised it. More competent answers looked at some of the poetic methods, with many noting

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the use of ‘quite graphic language such as fleas, miserable, hunger pinched and squalling babies,’ as one stated. Others explored the imagery and the use of personification as ‘tools to hammer home the true horrors of such poverty,’ as one noted. Very good answers developed such analysis into a structured argument, showing confident understanding of James’s use of the speaker in the poem, (some thinking this was ‘indeed obviously a lived experience for James himself’, as one suggested.) Others explored his concerns, offering well developed interpretations of how the ‘effects of poverty are used to shame the rich and the medical world into doing something to change things,’ as one put it. Very good answers also noted the breadth of James’s survey, ‘from babies to the old near death, from parents to children, all suffer equally from the ignorance and hard heartedness of the better off,’ as one suggested. Such arguments when supported by precise reference to the poem and its context often did very well.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/22
Prose and Unseen

Key Messages

- Successful responses focus on the writing of the texts and how the writer presents the meaning and content to the reader.
- Responses which rely on summary of the content of the set texts or unseen extracts are not successful.
- 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 focus securely on analysis of the writing of the selected extract in great detail.
- In the Unseen section, successful responses show how the text type's literary features communicate the meaning and contribute to the reader's understanding of the passage or poem.

General Comments

Candidates this session wrote responses to questions on all of the set texts. Most candidates showed knowledge of the subject matter of the novels and short stories, and many demonstrated some competence in exploring ways in which the writers communicate their concerns through choices of language, form and structure. Candidates will always be more successful with a firm focus on the writing of the texts, responding to question prompts such as 'presentation' and 'ways in which'. This is particularly true of the **(a)** questions, where candidates need some analysis of specific episodes from the texts to support their answers. For the Unseen section, candidates need a good grounding in key features of poetry, prose and drama texts so that they can respond to the text types which are presented to them on the question paper and analyse them accordingly.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Prose

Question 1

Ian McEwan: *Atonement*

(a) Less confident answers to the question on social class divisions related the action of the novel, with occasional references to the social classes of characters. These references were usually restricted to Robbie's position within the Tallis family. More successful essays looked at McEwan's characterisation and the structure of the plot making, for example, careful comparisons between Robbie and Paul Marshall. These looked at ways in which McEwan draws readers' sympathy towards Robbie and encourages distrust of Marshall, considering their roles within the Tallis family, the assault on Lola, Robbie's imprisonment and their roles in the war. Few responses considered McEwan's wider concerns with the ways in which the war broke down some social divisions.

(b) While there were some narrative-based answers, many candidates handled this passage and question competently, noting that the excerpt presents a temporary lull in the war for the characters, and that the war itself is presented through the characters' stories. There were some thoughtful comments on the way the opening creates tension through the half-seen details and the staccato dialogue, followed by the relief when the 'Shotguns' turn out to be 'baguettes' and a country feast, a sign of hospitality and friendship. Candidates were able to show how McEwan contrasts the comfort of the food and the companionship between the Frenchmen and the English

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soldiers with the reports from the farmers' drive to Arras. They noted how the 'chaos' is reinforced by the uncertainty of the progress or result of the battle, the number of refugees and the 'farmhouses burning'. The descent from the truck to 'drag' aside dead bodies received a lot of attention, with many noting that the horrors are communicated in an emotionless way, as if they are ordinary events, despite Henri being 'sick in the cab'. Several essays also noted the way the Frenchmen's report shows how ordinary lives have been destroyed by war, noting the lexis of 'destroyed', 'deserted' and 'smashed' in the final paragraph of the passage.

Question 2

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o: *Petals of Blood*

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

(b) The strongest essays on the passage were informed by the candidates' knowledge of Reverend Jerrod Brown's hypocrisy in the novel and thus made explicit their reading of Ngũgĩ's irony in the passage. These also demonstrated a clear awareness of the poverty of the delegation from Ilmorog and the contrast which Ngũgĩ creates between them and the grounds of Brown's house. There were some sharp comments on the description of the garden with the repetition of 'very neatly', while the irony of the cones suggesting 'perpetual supplication to heaven' is confirmed by Karega's thought about the 'sweat, art and craftsmanship', the 'energy and brains wasted on beautifying trees'. In this way, Ngũgĩ is already making the reader aware of the ostentatious wealth of the house's owner, apparently 'a man of God', compared unfavourably with the struggles of the journeying villagers. In the next stage of the passage, Ngũgĩ presents the protection of wealth with the security guards and fierce dogs. Some commented on how these aspects of the presentation of Brown already contradict Christian teaching, while others commented on the uniforms of the servants as the trappings of colonialism. In particular, some noted how the reader's perception is guided by Abdulla's thought that 'we fought to end red fezes and red bands on our bodies.' Most answers noted the characters', and perhaps the reader's, shock when Brown is discovered to be 'a black man'. This led to comments on neo-colonialism and on those who have profited out of independence, with some focused discussion of Jerrod Brown's change of name, erasing his Kenyan identity. Some commented on his position 'in the Anglican hierarchy' without noting Ngũgĩ's irony, and there were no comments on how Ngũgĩ undermines Brown by giving him a comic 'squeaky voice'.

Question 3

Stories of Ourselves Volume 2

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

(b) *The Tower* was a popular story for candidates to write about. While ideas about patriarchal masculinity and feminism are completely relevant to this story, it is important that candidates focus on the passage and the question and draw the issues out from those. In too many cases, essays concentrated on the wider contextual ideas without considering the writing of the passage in any great detail. More successful responses carefully considered the ways the architectural details suggest the gothic genre and create the suspense of Caroline's climb, with the 'low arched ceiling', 'narrow' staircase, 'rusty rail' and 'breaks in the rail'. Another key method Laski uses to create the tension is the structure of the passage, with six of the paragraphs beginning with a reference to the number of steps climbed, a crucial detail picked up only by a few candidates. Essays tended to be more successful, however, with Laski's presentation of Caroline's contrary impulses, alternately encouraging her upwards and suggesting she desist, using both direct speech and references to different 'part(s) of her brain'. There were also thoughtful comments on the gathering darkness and a few candidates commented on Laski's lack of reference to any view after Caroline has successfully ascended the tower, just giving the reader a sense of danger with 'immeasurably, unbelievably high'. A number of essays missed opportunities presented in the second page of the passage to comment on the sense of danger created, with the 'smooth' and 'shiny' stones, the 'soft, rotten wood', 'the cold sweat' and even 'the single impulse to hurl herself from the sloping platform.' Candidates should remember to focus on the passage and try to cover as much of it as possible.

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Question 4

Mark Twain: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

(a) Some essays were very clear that Twain presents a literal journey of Huck and Jim on a raft down the Mississippi, but in doing so, that he also presents a metaphorical journey for Huck, of growth, development and maturity. Other essays implied some awareness of the metaphorical journey, while others did not demonstrate appreciation of any journey beyond the literal one. This became a key discriminator, as did attention to the question wording, asking for discussion of 'some of the ways in which Twain explores' those journeys. A narrative account of the raft journey and the adventures of Huck and Jim could not address how Twain presents the journey. More successful responses considered Twain's episodic structure of the novel, narrating the picaresque adventures through Huck's own voice and perspective. Focusing on these aspects also provided opportunities to consider how Twain presents Huck learning from his experiences, criticising American society and developing his own moral understanding, which are all part of his metaphorical journey.

(b) A number of candidates chose the passage about the duke and the king, though little of the writing about this passage progressed far beyond a narrative summary. A handful of essays noted that Huck acknowledges directly that the men are 'frauds' and that he and Jim determine to escape from them, but there was little consideration of Twain's writing. For example, the list of attempted fraudulent activities in the second paragraph was often recounted, but without comment on its comic ironies, such as in 'a lecture on temperance; but they didn't make enough for them both to get drunk on', or the listing effect which emphasises the range of activities they attempt, without any expertise in any of them. More could have been written about how Huck's narration builds the tension about the duke's and king's 'heads together' and the 'deviltry' they might be discussing in the third paragraph. Few commented on the uncertainties about the disappearance of the king before the ending of the passage apparently creates hope for Huck's and Jim's escape. No essay acknowledged that this is the moment when the duke and king sell Jim as a slave – that proves to be the 'deviltry' which they were planning. Knowledge of this could have informed the way candidates wrote about the tension of the duke's and king's secret planning.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 – Poetry

Candidates on the whole responded well to this poem, though there was a tendency to assert responses about its beauty and emotional qualities without drawing those aspects out of a close reading of its form and content. Many asserted that the poem is a sonnet; few noted that though it is fourteen lines long, the patterning of its structure does not match either the Elizabethan or Petrarchan sonnet form. More careful answers noted that the first section, ll. 1-6, ending with a couplet, addresses the night itself, before the focus moves in the second section, ll. 7-14, to 'Lovers' who might 'meet' in the 'light' of the moon. A number of answers were marked by technical vocabulary which was unconvincingly used, such as assertions about the effects of dentals and fricatives, frequently incorrectly identified, and comments on caesuras which actually referred to the ends of lines. There was more success with discussion of the softness of the sibilance, especially in the first section and again with reference to the 'musically sweet/…soft fall of waters'. The apostrophe to and personification of the night was noted by many, while several candidates commented on how the early lines overturn possible preconceptions about the threats or fears of the night, noting the poet's paradoxical use of the adjective 'bright' to describe the 'dark'. Most recognised that the 'small silver bark' is a ship metaphor, some suggesting its visual appropriateness for a crescent moon. The evocation of love and lovers' talk in the second part of the poem was appreciated by many, some discussing clandestine night-time meetings, the effectiveness of the soft water image of the lovers' whispers and the hyperbole of 'Their heart run o'er with gladness'. Successful answers noted that the final two lines elevate both lovers and the night above ordinary mortals and the day, transforming them into the 'beautiful creations of a dream'.

Question 6 – Prose

Answers on the prose passage tended to be enthusiastic and many responded well to the first-person narrative and the wealth of detail in the writing. Several candidates picked out inclusions such as the 'white horse', the 'sign' and the 'power and height' of the horse as elements a reader might expect from a fairy tale or fantasy and identified the prose as an example of that genre. Most also picked out the 'ideograph' and the 'chopsticks' as indicators that the story is set in China. There were some useful comments on the writer's presentation of the colour and intricate designs of the finery of the horse, elevating it into a powerful and possibly magical creature. Several essays discussed the position of the narrator as respected, signalled

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through the vast range of gifts offered in long listing sentences, and many commented on her practicality and lack of vanity when she selects only the necessary and purposeful for her journey. A few candidates missed the sex of the narrator, assuming a male narrative, but more careful responses noted a typically feminine comparison with 'wedding presents' as well as the references to 'my men's clothes' and 'hair in a man's fashion', where the narrator's specifying of gender indicates that she is female, confirmed by the villagers' comment 'How beautiful she looks.' In confident answers, this generated interesting discussion of how the writer presents the ease with which the young woman slips between gender appearance and gender roles, acknowledged without comment. This obscuring of traditional gender roles is also presented in the young man who volunteers to join the narrator, saying 'I want to go with you' and is rewarded with 'You will be the first soldier in my army'. The narrator's decision to take only the sons 'their families could spare' was seen either as compassion, or a lack of feeling, with some candidates suggesting that the phrase implies that some sons may be expendable. No candidate commented on the depiction of those she refuses to take in ll. 35-36, which would have informed this argument. Several essays showed appreciation of the narrator's sense of history in ll. 37-38 and discussed how the peasants are presented as heroes, their cause a just one, and the emperors as tyrants. These interpreted the passage as presenting a campaign of social justice, with the 'peasants', 'farmer' and 'beggar' overcoming the uncaring 'emperors and dynasties'.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/32
Shakespeare and Drama

Key messages

- Candidates need to address the exact requirements of each question.
- Learners need to make sure that they understand the nature of 'context' and that it is integrated into their arguments, rather than being additional information.
- In many responses other people's opinions were alluded to, but they added little to the candidate's interpretation of the text. Candidates should include the opinion of others in a way that actively furthers their argument.

General comments

It is important that candidates are taught how to interpret a question so that they can structure answers appropriately. For example, with **Question 4(a)** 'in what ways' suggests that a range of techniques or moments need to be mentioned. The phrase 'with what dramatic effects,' acts as the key discriminator for higher-level candidates. Candidates cannot score highly if they do not tackle both aspects of the question. The best candidates do both simultaneously, integrating the step into each paragraph that they write.

Candidates should be encouraged not to address a **(b)** passage question with a line-by-line approach. A strategic view will always score more highly.

Candidates for this paper appear to have been more fully prepared for matters of context than in previous sessions. With **(b)** questions candidates were usually able to contextualise the extract within the action of the play itself, and in addition, most candidates made clear reference to aspects of historical or social context. Candidates should, however, be careful only to include context where it is relevant to their argument. Similarly, it should be used sparingly – many candidates spent much too long in questions on *The Merchant of Venice* simply talking about Shylock being Jewish in **(b)** or the relationship between men and women in the play in **(a)**. Similarly, with both questions on *King Lear* there was often a good deal of contextualising plot-telling which did not score particularly highly. The maxim might well be that a little context goes a very long way and that it should not be a substitute for considered discussion of textual detail. Candidates responding to the **(a)** question on *An Experiment with an Air Pump* often showed a solid sense of how the two worlds of the play explore science and scientific development, but this context sometimes disrupted or displaced discussion of 'dramatic effects' which was the central focus of the question.

Many candidates would benefit from a clearer understanding of Assessment Objective 5 (Evaluation of opinions) – the use and interpretation of others' views of the text. At its most simple level this can be demonstrated simply by a candidate reflecting that a scene or an issue might be interpreted in a variety of ways. Discussion of a video seen, or a play attended can often be useful for this purpose. At a deeper level, a candidate might evoke a critic's opinion in order to substantiate or give complexity to an argument. But the central point is that the critics quoted must be used in the candidate's response, not merely there for the sake of it. One candidate noted in a response on *The Merchant of Venice*: 'As Samuel Johnson said: "Shakespeare is a genius but his way of using language is very complex and it is difficult to understand."' This is not what is meant by evaluation of opinion as it adds nothing to the discussion.

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Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

William Shakespeare: *The Merchant of Venice*

(a) Too few responses to comment.

(b) Candidates at the lower end were very willing to talk about the trial scene in general but not about this particular moment, which occurs before. There was often a lot of background plot-telling to demonstrate that candidates knew what had brought the characters to this moment. Better responses were able to focus more fully on the language of the passage and talk about how Antonio uses animal and nature imagery to demean Shylock and characterise his lack of compromise. There was also discussion of Gratiano's highly emotive language towards the end: 'be thou damn'd inexecrable dog!'. The best candidates were able to talk about Shylock as a reasonable man who maintains his dignity and argues logically ('There is no force in the decrees of Venice' ... 'I stand here for law'), shocked by his treatment by the state. Others suggested, by means of context, that Shylock is simply intransigent. One or two candidates unwisely engaged with the exact nature of Antonio and Bassanio's relationship in the play, an issue which is barely relevant at this point. The best candidates engaged with both language and issues whilst maintaining a view of how this might be presented dramatically.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *King Lear*

(a) Too few responses to comment.

(b) Too few responses to comment.

Section B: Drama

Question 3

ATHOL FUGARD: *The Train Driver and Other Plays*

(a) Too few responses to comment.

(b) Too few responses to comment.

Question 4

SHELAGH STEPHENSON: *An Experiment with an Air Pump*

(a) Too few responses to comment.

(b) Too few responses to comment.

Question 5

TOM STOPPARD: *Indian Ink*

(a) Too few responses to comment.

(b) Some candidates took a slightly narrative view of the scene, providing an account rather than an analysis. Better responses were aware of the ways in which Stoppard slides between the two time periods of the play in order to demonstrate changing attitudes towards colonialism. There was much useful discussion of Anish as an intermediary (lines 15-35) as he fills in the historical background and his family history. There was also interesting discussion of how Das and Flora seem to transcend the colonial experience early in the extract, very much seeing each other as equals. Many candidates focused on the discussion between Anish and Mrs Swan, and their

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slightly barbed comments to each other. Much was made of the fact that Mrs Swan avoids criticism by stuffing Anish with cake. Candidates were also quick to identify her slightly patronising superiority, which merely serves to display her ignorance and lack of understanding. The best responses were able to see how the whole scene fits together dramatically, as something to be seen on a stage, rather than as an articulation of contrasting viewpoints. Useful points were often made about differences of vocabulary – the difference in perspective between the 'first War of Independence ... the Rising of 1857', which Mrs Swann recalls from her history lessons as 'the Mutiny.' Some stronger responses saw the scene as one of friendly mutual incomprehension, rather than as antagonism between the two.

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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

Key messages

- When responding to a question, candidates should plan their response before writing in order to form a cohesive structure for their ideas and to make the most of the time available to them.
- Close, relevant analysis is significant in determining success at all levels of ability and reference to technical language and effects must relate to the question and direction of argument.
- In extract based **(b)** questions, the focus should be on the detail of the passage with relevant reference made to the wider text. Selection of quotations and points for discussion should be specific and dealt with from an analytical perspective rather than a descriptive or narrative view.

General comments

Candidates engaged well with the paper and there was no evidence in this series of rubric infringement. It was clear that most candidates had effective knowledge and understanding of the texts at different ability levels and were well prepared for the questions. The majority of candidates chose the **(b)** question on the text studied. There was some definite improvement in knowledge of genre in terms of poetry and prose and their characteristic features, but some answers still referred to texts inaccurately as 'plays' or wrote about novels as 'poems'. Understanding the genre and its audience is an important element in terms of literary context and the structure and intended effects of a text.

Assessment Objective 2 (Analysis) was often an area that discriminated outcomes for candidates, sometimes between levels. Where candidates used sharp and specific analysis, they achieved positive outcomes for this assessment objective. One successful response to **3(b)** on Emily Dickinson's *There's a certain slant of Light* considered the reference to light and its positive connotations with further exploration of Dickinson's intention in subverting this symbolism. A less successful response answering on **8(b)**, *The Langur Coloured Night* commented on the 'images used to paint a picture in the reader's mind' without further developing this idea or explaining with use of detail or specific argument. In several cases, candidates attempted analysis of effects, but comments were loosely or generally anchored to detail. It is important for candidates to consider effects of form, structure and language in terms of the writer's intent and within the context of the work being studied. Successful answers were also able to refer to how a poet uses effects across their work, drawing in other poems with relevance. General references to effects are to be avoided, including lists of effects such as 'the poem contains onomatopoeia, metaphors and juxtaposition'. Candidates who could discriminate between describing or commenting on an effect and analysing or evaluating achieved more successful outcomes.

Strategic answers to **(a)** questions resulted in the most successful outcomes for candidates. Much of this relies on careful consideration of the question and a planned argument in response. Where the **(a)** question has a stimulus quotation, candidates who take this carefully into consideration tend to develop specific and interesting arguments that meet the terms of the assessment objective. For example, in **7(a)** where the question requires a discussion of the ways in which 'Atwood complicates a reader's response to the Commander', the given quotation was used well by candidates working at the top of Level 3 and above. Some candidates working towards the lower end of Level 3 and below tended to try to cover the whole plot and all characters in their chosen text. This approach leads to a superficial narrative response that does not successfully meet the terms of the mark scheme. Better answers selected significant moments in the text to exemplify the points they wished to make. An example of this approach was seen in one answer to **7(a)** that promoted the idea of Offred as dependent on the Commander through her need for his companionship. The examples of the scrabble game and evening at Jezebel's were used purposefully to support. Candidates tended to be less confident when using quotations in **(a)** answers. This relates to close knowledge of the text and its meaning. The best answers integrated apt textual reference with clarity and insight, some making original use of this detail to present coherent and imaginative arguments.

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Personal engagement varied across answers and the best approaches featured clear, independent engagement with the central concerns of the texts studied. Examiners commented on some sensitive exploration of attitudes to aspects such as madness in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and control in *The Handmaid's Tale* as well as some effective links between alternative interpretations and personal responses to these ideas. One candidate used a critical comment on 'degrees of dystopia' in *The Handmaid's Tale* to respond in personal terms to concepts of dehumanisation and exploitation of women, building on the perception of privilege inherent when ideology meets reality. Candidates working at Level 2 and lower Level 3 tended to respond in simple terms to matters of character and plot with better attempts shaping relevant arguments in line with the question.

Aspects of contextual knowledge and understanding were integrated well into a range of answers, for example in **1(b)** where candidates were required to write about a passage from Volume 1, Chapter 4 of *Persuasion*, one answer used an exploration of the roles of women in the Regency period to develop arguments about Anne Elliot's relationship with Captain Wentworth. Contextual detail was less relevant where links were more tangential, for example, reflections on Emily Dickinson's mental health without clarification of links to the given poem or wider collection. Reference to concepts of dystopia and patriarchy were well linked to Atwood's concerns in answers working at Level 4 and above. Less focused responses hinted at contextual elements but did not use these to add to an argument or support a line of thinking.

This series more candidates dealt effectively with evaluation of other interpretations and opinions, Assessment Objective 5 (Evaluation of opinions), than in previous series. This was because candidates working at the upper end of Level 3 and above made relevant reference to critical views and ideas with the question in view. An example of insightful and original use of Assessment Objective 5 can be seen in an answer to **3(b)** where the candidate has very effectively integrated their view of Dickinson 'kickstarting a lyrical contemplation of life and death and despair' in *There's a certain Slant of Light* via a point made by Martha Hale Shackford about objectification of 'swiftly passing moments'. Less successful responses commented in more blunt terms on the existence of alternative views with varying success, sometimes struggling to keep a clear overview of the text and its concerns.

Comments on specific questions

Questions 1-12

There were insufficient responses to the texts to be able to comment on performance.

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