

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/11 Drama and Poetry

Key messages

- 1 Candidates need to develop analysis beyond a checklist approach to reach the higher levels of assessment.
- 2 Many successful essays have a clearly organised and purposeful structure.

General comments

The large majority of candidates this session showed at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. There were almost no rubric errors 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 still some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level. There were responses to nearly all of the questions on the paper. Answers reflecting a wide range of performance were seen on most of the texts attempted by the candidates, with the most popular choices being *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in **Section A: Drama**, the selection from *Songs of Ourselves* in **Section B: Poetry** and *The Underground Railroad* in **Section C: Prose**.

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

- 1 Many candidates, particularly, though not exclusively, when answering **(b)** passage questions, adopt a checklist approach when considering the writer's style. For example, in poetry essays the plan will list caesura, rhyme, alliteration and metaphor. The candidate will give one or two examples of these methods in the essay proper, often appropriate and with supporting quotation, but without any analysis of how these methods work or contribute to the poetic meaning. Nor is there any commentary on the effects of these methods on the reader or on the audience. This is a limited approach to literary analysis and more successful responses always integrate perceptive commentary of the writer's choices into their overall argument.
- 2 Assessment Objective 4 from the Literature in English syllabus states that candidates should 'communicate a relevant, structured and supported response'. Many candidates would improve the overall success of their essays by having a clear structure in mind before starting to write, incorporating an appropriate and focused introduction, a purposeful argument and a controlled apt conclusion. This will often be the consequence of some 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.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) There were only a very few responses seen on this question. Weaker answers summarised Esther's character and role in the play generally, with some very weak answers confusing her for Sophia, which limited the success of these responses. The more competent answers considered the passage, often noting the ease of Esther's relationship with Epf and 'her confidence in front of him', which a few candidates noted would be developed later in the play. Epf's positive attitude towards her and her hopeful future was often discussed, though very few answers considered John's dramatic methods in detail. The setting, the contrasting language and the implicit comparison between Mavis and Esther were partially analysed and there was some understanding of the significance of this exchange to Esther's characterisation and to the play more generally.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) The minority of candidates who chose this question was nearly always able to place the passage in a precise context, with weaker responses offering detailed narrative summaries of the action to this point in the play. Other weaker responses summarised the two characters and what happened to them in the rest of the play. In both cases, too little attention was given to the detail of the set passage. More focused responses were alive to the 'two conflicting agendas the characters bring to the debate', with some considering the dramatic tension that this conflict created. More competent answers, aware of Angelo's preceding 'soul searching in his soliloquy', as one candidate suggested, explored his characterisation in detail as he 'shifts from a figure of justice and authority into a bullying hypocrite'. Other candidates were 'shocked by his threats of torture', and his demeaning of Isabella's situation. Good answers considered some of Shakespeare's concerns in detail: justice, morality, authority, religion and social and gender inequalities were popular discussion points. More successful answers explored Shakespeare's dramatic methods in detail, for example language and imagery, often contrasting his legalistic choices such as 'arrest', 'warrants' and 'accusation' with her 'more emotional and broken speech patterns', as one essay noted. Others considered the setting, as well as the possible action: 'what, we wonder, does Angelo physically do as he declares himself', one candidate considered. Good answers explored the effects of Isabella's closing soliloquy, in terms of her characterisation and in 'setting up the dialogue with her brother and the Duke's intervention later on,' as one essay noted. More perceptive responses analysed, for example, Isabella's excusing Claudio's sin as 'prompture of the blood' though 'she fails to see Angelo in the same light.' Other strong responses explored the nuances of her comment 'more than our brother is our chastity,' with some seeing her as self-centred or even self-obsessed, though others thought this was how 'a would-be nun should react'. At this level, many candidates were able to explore the ambiguities of the play with sophisticated and thoughtful arguments, often concluding that this was 'why the play was a problem.'

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

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

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular text from **Section B**, with over half of the candidates choosing the text, the vast majority of whom tackled the **(b)** passage option.

- (a)** This was the minority choice on *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* with only a few responses seen. Weaker answers summarised some of the events of the play and what the main characters did, with success determined by how well the candidate had selected relevant material. Those who focused on the failing marriages of Brick and Maggie and Big Daddy and Big Mama were often able to shape their response appropriately, with others focusing more on some of the 'critical problems' such as Brick's drinking, Big Daddy's cancer and 'the tension created by the conflict over the estate and the money', as one candidate suggested. Better answers considered 'family tensions' more closely, with some interpreting 'family' as the brothers and their wives, whereas others thought of it as 'children and relationships with parents'. Each approach offered plenty of scope to address the task, though only more competent responses discussed Gooper's comment with any confidence. At this level, the consensus was that there was little 'evidence of the best coming out of any of them', though some candidates argued convincingly that Big Mama is 'the one character who is genuine in her devotion to Big Daddy in his time of need'. Good answers focused on Williams's presentation of the various tensions: Maggie's characterisation was a popular discussion point, with her lack of 'family in the shape of children, a particular cause of tension for her'. as one essay argued. Other dramatic methods discussed were Williams's use of stage directions, the contrasting (and conversely) similar husband/wife dialogues, the use of settings and symbols, particularly the bedroom and Brick's crutch and Mae and Gooper's children, 'often the cause of conflict at inopportune moments', as one candidate noted. Very good answers supported such arguments with detailed and precise references to the play and often with a perceptive sense of appropriate contexts.
- (b)** Candidates with a clear understanding of the dramatic context to this passage were able to respond with confidence. Some weaker answers were unclear as to what had already been revealed which limited their interpretation of the relationship in the passage. Other weak answers summarised the overall situations of the two men in the play in detail, but with a consequent loss of focus on the passage itself. Better answers at this level were aware of Brick's knowledge of Big Daddy's cancer and were able to discuss 'why Brick feels so uncomfortable as Big Daddy reveals his desires to him', as one candidate argued. Competent answers did explore what is revealed about Big Daddy's state of mind in the passage but kept in mind how 'this might affect Brick's view of his father', with the desire for other women and his dislike of Big Mama often explored in interesting ways with engaged personal response. Good answers always kept the focus on Williams's dramatic presentation, considering the language of both men in detail, especially 'Brick's caginess and Big Daddy's easiness with his son', as one candidate noted. Other dramatic methods considered were the setting, the action (particularly the closing of the door – often well linked to the wider text) and the stage directions. Other good responses analysed Brick's 'respect and politeness to his father', while others thought there was some development of Big Daddy's character in his 'musings about humans and pigs' but also in his 'willingness to expose his true feelings to his son, something he would never do to Gooper', according to one. Very good responses developed such arguments by close reference to the detail of the passage, as well as integrating references to the wider text, most notably how this 'father-son chat develops into Brick's confessions about Skipper and Big Daddy learning the truth about his cancer'. Where such interpretations were supported by apposite quotations and awareness of appropriate contexts, the answers did very well.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

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

- (b) Nearly every candidate showed at least a basic knowledge of the poem's meaning and some understanding of Angelou's concerns. Those candidates aware of the context to Arkansas itself were able to integrate contextual support into their arguments, often with detailed reference to Angelou's biography and also the wider text. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the poem, often without reference to the specifics of the task, but were nonetheless often engaged and offered interesting personal responses. More competent answers did explore the tension in the poem, recognising 'the racial and historical context that Angelou is alluding to', as one candidate noted. The poet's language and imagery choices were often well discussed at this level, with many sound analyses of the references to trees and blood, for example, as well as the effects of 'writhes' and 'brooding'. Strong answers considered a wider range of poetic methods, including the verse form, the poetic rhythms and the 'harsh and disturbing alliteration' was noted. The contextual allusions were very well analysed at this level and often seen as 'a key element in the rising tension', according to one. Angelou's skill in 'suggesting so many reasons for the tension in the air with the briefest word', as one candidate put it, was well analysed in the strongest responses, particularly the links between history and nature. Others at this level considered her use of time and symbols with perceptive understanding. Where such arguments were supported by close reference to this poem, with contextual points integrated into their argument, the responses did very well.

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

- (a) There were only a few responses seen to this question. Just about every response had sufficient knowledge and understanding of the poem with which to address the question. Weaker answers tended to summarise more or less relevant examples of loyalty generally, with an understandable focus on Sir Gawain and his relationships with Lady Bertilak, King Arthur and Lord Bertilak/the Green Knight. Better answers at this level did shape their arguments, at least implicitly, to consider Armitage's presentation, often contrasting 'the Bertilaks' deviousness and untrustworthiness' as one candidate suggested, with Gawain's 'true knightly behaviour in taking the place of Arthur despite knowing the inevitable outcome'. More successful responses developed such basic contrasts through detailed commentaries on, for example, the nature of a knight's loyalty, with some interesting discussions about chivalry and the knightly code, enabling answers at this level to show both textual and contextual knowledge and understanding. Good answers looked closely at Armitage's methods, with confident, and at times perceptive, explorations of characterisation, symbols and poetic language, 'for Gawain is always described in positive terms as he fends off the temptations of the lady', as one candidate argued. Very good answers also developed their analyses to consider the effects of Armitage's choices, how the 'positive tone and religious language ensure the reader's response to Gawain and his situation throughout the poem', as one essay argued. Where such points were supported by apposite quotation and some contextual awareness, the responses did well. Few candidates even at this level were confident in discussing Armitage's alliterative techniques, but those who were, and could explore the effects appropriately, often did very well.
- (b) This was the less popular choice of question on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Weaker answers tended to summarise the events leading up to the hunting of the boar or to paraphrase the actual hunt, with only a basic personal response. For example, 'the hunt is violent and bloodthirsty and shows lord Bertilak for what he really is', as one candidate suggested. Better answers at this level were able to give a more precise context, explaining why, for example, 'the hunting of the boar is important because it contrasts with what is happening in the castle between the lady and Gawain'. More competent answers considered some of Armitage's poetic methods in detail, particularly his use of language in describing the hunt, with its 'richness and energy', as one candidate noted. Others noted the use of sound and action 'to create the atmosphere of the hunt in the reader's mind'. Good answers analysed the effects of these poetic choices and were aware of the significance of the extract to the text as a whole. Very few candidates were confident in discussing Armitage's alliterative verse or its effects. Very good answers developed the links to the wider text well: 'the ideas of hunting and its underlying excitement and danger is reflected in Armitage's concerns in the whole poem, where Gawain is the prey, likely to come to a similarly bloody death.' Where such interpretations were supported by precise reference to the passage, with some awareness of effects, the responses often did very well.

Question 7

WILLIAM BLAKE: Selected Poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment about performance.
- (b) There were very few responses to this question. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the poem with only intermittent reference to the question and in some cases gaps in basic knowledge, suggestive of the poem being read as an unseen. Better answers at this level had sufficient knowledge to explain the shifting narrative focus as 'the speaker moves from his own view into praising God's power to overcome grief', as one candidate suggested. More competent responses often went through the poem stanza by stanza, offering personal responses on 'the effects of the different kinds of sorrow and how faith can overcome them', as one candidate argued. Most essays noted the 'range of sorrow across the human and the natural world', as one essay put it. Responses at this level also considered some of Blake's poetic methods. For example, 'his use of sad words such as "tears" and "woes" and "grief" create a mood of sadness in the reader', which is then contrasted with 'the joy of God's support in times of trouble'. Stronger answers considered poetic form, as well as rhythm and versification, often considered to be 'child-like and reminiscent of a nursery rhyme'. Where such points were supported by appropriate reference to the poem, the essays became more confident, though only a very few answers were able to analyse the effects of Blake's choices. Stronger responses were often able to support points with quotations from the wider text as well as some appropriate context, most typically about Blake's usual attitudes to religion and children.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment about performance.
- (b) Nearly every response had relevant, personal opinions to share about the woman and her situation. Some very weak responses lacked basic knowledge and understanding of the overall meaning, ignoring or misinterpreting the former lover for example. Better answers at this level retold the events in the poem, with the tone variously described as 'sad and nostalgic' or 'melancholic and relaxing', though nearly all candidates were sympathetic to 'her situation and her lost love and life', as one essay described it. More competent responses were more nuanced in their assessment of the woman. For some, the presentation was 'negative because of the mindless monotony of her existence', whereas other candidates noted the setting: 'A park, which is open and unemotional at the same time, makes her loneliness even stronger' or as another essay suggested 'she can be seen but not heard, she is a part of the landscape'. The woman's life as a young mother was often remarked on. For example, some candidates thought 'The stagnation of the woman is emphasised by the simple tonality and matter of factness of voice', and even her 'sitting position is an indication of inactivity and disinterest in her life'. Stronger answers considered some of the poetic methods in detail. Her clothes were often analysed and being 'out of date' were thought to 'demonstrate the woman's exhaustion and how little time she has for herself', as one essay argued. For some candidates, 'Harwood uses understatement to bring the woman out as socially reduced and emotionally lifeless'. This led to strong answers analysing the presentation of the ex-lover, 'oblique and suggestive in depicting his suaveness contrasted to her shabbiness', as one put it. The most successful responses were fully analytical, exploring, for example, the rhyme scheme and the structuring of the poem to great effect, though only a few candidates were confident enough to discuss the sonnet form and consider why Harwood might have chosen to use it in this particular poem.

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- 2 Assessment Objective 4 from the Literature in English syllabus states that candidates should 'communicate a relevant, structured and supported response'. Many candidates would improve the overall success of their essays by having a clear structure in mind before starting to write, incorporating an appropriate and focused introduction, a purposeful argument and a controlled apt conclusion. This will often be the consequence of some 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.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

- (a) The few answers seen on this question all revealed at least a basic knowledge of Epf's character and his role in the play. Weaker answers tended to summarise his relationships, some focusing on Sophia and most focusing on Rose. His 'abuse of her attraction to him', as one candidate styled it, was often discussed, leading some better answers to link this to his relationship with his grandmother and how he treated her. Other competent responses also connected him with Charlie, because of his acceptance of Sophia and Esther. More competent responses explored the complexities of his relationships, 'tender and thoughtful at times, as he is with Esther, and yet brutal and untrusting with Rosa'. Some candidates pointed out that 'her relationship with Old Mack gave him grounds for suspicion'. The very few stronger answers did consider John's methods and how Epf is presented, both physically ('Mavis's desire for him indicates how attractive he is') and linguistically. Those responses which did attempt analysis of John's language had secure knowledge and understanding, enabling them to 'show how limited Epf is intellectually', as one suggested. Others thought this was also revealed in his belief that 'going to England would solve his restlessness'. However, most responses were at least able to see how his lack of trust and his fear of being trapped were revealed in the various relationships and where such arguments were supported by close textual references the answers were at least firmly competent.
- (b) There were only a very few responses to this question. Weaker answers summarised what happens to Mavis and Sophia throughout the course of the play, with only sporadic focus on the given passage. Better responses at this level did consider their relationship, at least implicitly, with the majority focusing on their 'all too obvious hatred for each other', as one candidate noted. They were seen as either opposites or in some responses as 'quite similar, in that both women are feisty, struggling to survive and stand up for themselves'. Most candidates had strong opinions to share about the two women and the more these were supported by reference to the passage and some awareness of John's methods, the more competent the answers became. Language, setting and action were the most common methods discussed, though only occasionally were candidates able to consider the dramatic effects of John's choices. The strongest responses were able to see the passage in terms of the whole text, though appreciation of relevant contexts was only intermittent.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

- (a) Nearly every response was able to find relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers often listed the various potential marriages and explained what had happened to the couples in them during the course of the play. Success at this level was determined by the depth of the textual knowledge and how far the candidate was able to show understanding of the characters involved. Better answers, at least implicitly, contrasted the reactions of Lucio and Claudio, for example, whilst other responses considered 'the gender divide in the play, where Mariana was pleased to get her husband, despite his failings, though Angelo would see it as a punishment for his wrongdoing', as one essay suggested. More competent responses focused on the attitudes – Claudio and Juliet were often seen as a 'loving couple, embracing marriage as a positive outcome of their relationship', whereas other candidates saw the similarities in their position to Lucio and Kate Keepdown and discussed the opposing reactions. The Duke was often criticised for his 'manipulations, particularly in forcing marriage onto unwilling men', but other responses wondered if his 'real motivation for keeping Isabella chaste was only revealed in his unanswered marriage proposal'. Good answers developed such arguments in considering some of the wider themes of the play, with money and social status often seen as the driving force in many of the attitudes to marriage: 'Hence Claudio's delay and Angelo's breaking off with Mariana', as one candidate argued. For other strong responses, 'attitudes to marriage, in this play, seem to follow attitudes to sex and morals', as one essay argued, explaining why Isabella is 'reluctant to accept the Duke's offer'. Very good responses always kept Shakespeare's presentation firmly in mind, exploring how the language and imagery used by the various characters is the best guide to their attitudes. Lucio's coarseness and Angelo's materialistic vocabulary were well analysed, as well as Isabella's 'almost too pious and holy comments', as one candidate put it. Other successful responses noted

the various contrasts Shakespeare creates, as well as discussing his use of dramatic action and symbols. Where such arguments were supported by close reference to the text the responses did very well.

- (b) Weaker responses tended to retell the Duke's role in the play as a whole, often in accurate detail, but with too little focus on the particulars of the passage. Better answers at this level were aware that this was near the beginning of the play and that 'the Duke was explaining what he was about to do in Vienna', as one candidate suggested. His role as a 'fake friar, starting at this point in the play' was much discussed and there was awareness of his apparent ambivalence towards Angelo. More competent responses were able to unpick the various threads of his characterisation here, with many candidates unimpressed with his 'failures as a duke, his cowardice in getting Angelo to do his dirty work and his wish to sneakily test Angelo', as one essay summarised it. Other sound answers linked this passage more precisely to the wider text – the testing of Angelo, the moral corruption of the city and the Duke's role as a friar were often explored. Better answers at this level often noted how these different concerns were 'reflected in the Duke's characterisation, as well as being the main drivers in the play's plot'. Good answers developed such arguments by considering the Duke's language in particular in the passage: his 'constant use of the first-person pronoun, his assumption of authority over Friar Thomas and his deviousness' were well analysed. Other good responses noted his use of imagery, the 'o'ergrown lion' and the 'twigs of birch' suggesting a certain 'violence in his personality', though others thought his 'exaggerations about the nurse and baby, for example, were indicative of his desperation to excuse himself', as one candidate suggested. Nearly every answer at this level discussed his manipulative deceptions, with some seeing his disguise as a friar as Machiavellian in 'using religion to hide his real purposes'. Very good answers were able to integrate contextual points into their arguments, showing perceptive awareness of the significance of Shakespeare's characterisation of the Duke at this point in the play.

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

- (a) This was the slightly more popular choice on *The Duchess of Malfi*. Nearly every candidate was able to select relevantly from the play in addressing the question. Weaker answers retold the stories of characters they considered to be ambitious, with Bosola, Antonio and the Duchess the most popular choices. Success at this level was determined by how well the candidates shaped their opinions and supporting textual references to the task. Better essays at this level identified different kinds of ambition – such as Bosola's desire for preferment and the Duchess's ambition to remarry a man of her choice. More competent responses contrasted these differences, implicitly at least, discussing Webster's dramatic exploration and often across a wider selection of characters. More successful responses considered ambition as an abstract concept, also discussing its effects on the characters, with some candidates offering interesting and evidenced ideas about the 'corruption that always seems to follow when ambition appears in a character', as one suggested. Other successful responses considered Webster's dramatic methods closely, particularly his use of language and striking imagery. Only the strongest responses were confidently able to consider the effects of these methods. The most successful responses supported such ideas with apposite and accurate reference to the text and, in some cases, appropriate contexts.
- (b) Candidates who had a clear understanding of the context to this passage had a secure framework on which to construct their responses. Weaker answers often summarised the relationship and what happened to the characters throughout the entire play, with too little focus on the detail of the given passage, though often showing a basic knowledge and understanding. More successful answers recognised the significance of this passage in 'revealing a tender and loving couple, so that their tragic ends are all the more upsetting', as one candidate suggested. Competent answers explored the tone of this exchange between the lovers, variously seen as comic, domestic, gentle and sensual. This led some candidates into considering how Webster created the dramatic mood. Language and imagery were confidently discussed in some responses, though only a few candidates could confidently explore the dramatic effects of Webster's choices. Those candidates who remembered the next scene with Ferdinand were best placed to recognise the impact of this scene and to explore how 'the heightened tension in the next scene was in part created by his choices in this scene', as one candidate noted. Answers which supported such arguments with close reference to both the passage and the wider text did very well.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

- (a) This was a popular question albeit the minority choice on this text. Every response had relevant opinions on Big Mama as a character and on her role in the play. Weaker responses summarised what happened to her during the course of the action, often showing detailed basic knowledge. Better answers at this level had a basic understanding of her different roles. For example, 'Williams presents her as a loving mother and a devoted wife, lively and funny, so that the audience is always pleased to see her', as one essay summarised it. More competent answers were more nuanced in their opinions, noting the 'disparity in her treatment of her sons, perhaps the root cause of Gooper's attitudes', with other candidates noting her 'unfair accusations of Maggie', as well as 'her disinterest in her grandchildren and her disregard for social conventions in her horseplay with the reverend'. More successful responses were often perceptive about her relationship with Big Daddy. Some candidates saw her as 'a victim of 1950s social pressures,' though others remembered her spending spree and her 'over-the-top jewellery', with good responses analysing how Williams used these methods to shape the audience's response. Her language 'but especially her silences' were also well discussed, 'as these were Williams's main tools in creating pathos for this larger-than-life character', as one candidate argued. These methods were often perceptively analysed with candidates showing detailed knowledge and engaged understanding of the text and, in the strongest answers, an appreciation of its dramatic effects. Stage directions and symbols were often well explored with some strong responses showing a sophisticated grasp of plastic theatre and 'how Williams uses it here to create the complexity in her portrayal', as one candidate put it, citing the bed, the morphine and Gooper's briefcase as telling examples. Very good answers were able to select appropriate material from the whole play, neatly linking textual and contextual support into a seamless argument.
- (b) This was the most popular question in the drama section and nearly every response offered engaged personal opinions about the Pollitt family at this stage of the play. Weaker answers, ignoring the specific task, retold the story of the play, often showing detailed basic knowledge of plot and characters. Better answers at this level were aware of the tensions 'and the conflict caused by Maggie's announcement of her fake pregnancy', as one candidate noted. 'The more open hostility between the sisters-in-law, contrasted with the civil exchange between the brothers' was often discussed. More competent responses were very clear on the context and how 'the pregnancy, the cancer and the battle for the estate were all coming to a climax at this point', as one candidate summarised it. Williams's methods were soundly analysed at this level, particularly his 'use of stage directions and punctuation to make the atmosphere very clear to the audience', as one response noted. Other discussion points were his use of symbols such as the liquor, the 'fierceness' of Maggie's and Mae's interactions with their husbands and the 'shocking effect of Big Daddy's agonised cries'. Strong answers analysed the effects of these dramatic methods perceptively, as well as linking the passage to the wider text appropriately. At this level, answers kept the possible audiences in clear focus, often exploring how a contemporary audience might respond differently than a twenty-first century one. There were some engaged interpretations on, for example, the role of women and the effects of greed and deception on family relationships. These responses always had a sophisticated understanding of the dramatic situation and could respond sensitively to shifts in tone, such as the comedy of Maggie's 'Gracious!'. Analysis was always specific, as were references to the wider text, with appropriate and telling contextual points well integrated into the arguments.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

- (a) There were very few responses to this question. Nearly every response was able to select relevant poems to discuss. Weaker answers tended to retell their chosen poems, often in some detail, though without directly connecting the methods and effects of the chosen poems. Better answers at this level were able to explore, at least implicitly, different types of violence. Racial and domestic violence were widely discussed. Others at this level were able to discuss verbal and physical violence as well. More competent answers often chose contrasting poems to explore how Angelou presents violence, with *My Arkansas* and *A Kind of Love, Some Say* being popular choices. Most

answers saw violence as presented through poems about human relationships, 'since whether in the home or in the streets, Angelou shows violence as a people issue', as one candidate suggested, citing *Men* and *To Beat the Child Was Bad Enough*. Good answers were able to link their chosen poems through analysis of their contrasting methods, enabling some candidates to make interesting points on poetic choices. Other good answers looked at the language and imagery in detail, contrasting the 'ordinariness of the settings with the disturbing memories of racial and domestic violence', as one put it. Very good answers were able to integrate analytical and contextual points into the body of the interpretation and, where supported by precise reference to the poems, the answers did well.

- (b) This was the more popular choice on *And Still I Rise* and nearly every response had relevant opinions about Angelou's presentation of women 'through the many work roles that society expects of them', as one candidate summarised it. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the poem, with little reference to Angelou or her poetic methods. Better answers at this level did notice the different kinds of work 'which might represent different women in a variety of situations', as one essay put it. Domestic and nurturing work was often commented on, with some candidates picking up the 'possible references to slavery in cutting cane and picking cotton'. The work was seen as imposed on the women by men, society or 'historical expectations', as one suggested. More competent answers were able to consider the second part of the poem and what the effects of 'the natural world are on the struggling and hard-pressed women', as one essay wondered. The shift in tone in the poem as well as the changes in language and rhythm were well discussed at this level, with stronger answers able to analyse specific moments in the poem and explore the effects of Angelou's choices. Many argued that 'the misery of the overworked and put upon women was alleviated only by the natural world around them, not by society or their men', with some seeing this as a common theme in Angelou's poetry. Strong answers were alive to her use of the first person and the 'immediacy that creates', while other responses noted that 'the pace created by the short active verbs and the relentless rhythm of the first stanza is completely changed in the closing stanzas', as one essay suggested, 'for the soothing power of nature is reflected in the imperatives and much softer alliteration of the second half of the poem'. The strongest responses developed such analysis of methods and effects perceptively, integrating references to the wider text and appropriate contexts seamlessly into a sophisticated argument.

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

- (a) There were only a very few responses to this question. Most essays had at least a basic knowledge of the text from which to select relevant material, though some weak answers did retell the story of Gawain's quest in detail, noting how 'fearful it was for him to know he was going to be executed by the Green Knight', as one candidate put it. Better answers at this level identified different kinds of fear – most commonly fear of death, of failure and of being seen as a coward. More competent answers developed these points, considering their significance to Armitage's plot and methods of characterisation, often supported by appropriate reference to the text. There were very few strong responses to this question, with only occasional references to Armitage's presentation. Popular choices were contrasting characters such as Gawain and Lord Bertilak, the symbolic use of the hunting physically and metaphorically (and the fear of the boar in particular) and 'the use of knightly codes of honour to emphasise what was at stake for Gawain and Arthur's court', as one noted. There was however only occasional reference to Armitage's poetic methods such as alliterative verse and his language choices, which limited the success of some otherwise strong essays.
- (b) There were only a few responses to this question. Weaker answers summarised the relationship between Gawain and the lord throughout the entire poem, recognising Bertilak's dual role as the Green Knight, though not always appreciating that is not, in the moment of the extract, known to either Gawain or the reader. Better answers at this level, aware of this 'more serious and dangerous backstory', as one candidate put it, did focus on the wager and its significance. More competent responses considered the characterisation here, particularly of the lord and how 'he is welcoming and friendly, with a seemingly high regard for Gawain'. Others noted Gawain's 'more subdued responses, as if more on guard,' which a few candidates thought was 'inevitable given what was hanging over him.' Answers at this level became stronger as candidates considered some of Armitage's methods of presentation: his use of dialogue, the tone and mood of the gathering, the descriptions of the lady and what she would do as well as some of the language,

especially Gawain's 'gracious' and 'truth' and bowing to the lord, were all popular discussion points. Very few answers were able to discuss Armitage's alliterative verse with any confidence or to fully analyse the effects of some of Armitage's poetic choices. This limited the success of otherwise promising essays.

Question 7

WILLIAM BLAKE: Selected Poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

- (a) There were very few responses seen to this question. Most responses had at least a basic knowledge of the text and were able to select more or less relevant poems with which to address the task. Very weak answers did attempt to use poems they knew well such as *The Chimney Sweeper*, rather than poems more relevant to the task, with consequent limitations on the effectiveness of their response. Better answers at this level were able to summarise their chosen poems, with *Holy Thursday*, *Introduction* and *Nurse's Song* being popular choices. At this level, there was understanding of Blake's concerns generally, for example 'how song is associated with innocence, happiness and especially children', as one essay suggested. This was often asserted, rather than demonstrated by reference to the text. More competent answers were able to do this and often to integrate specific textual to support the interpretation. Sound answers also considered some of his poetic methods, with candidates showing awareness of Blake's choices of language and imagery, in particular. The very few stronger answers were confidently able to consider some of the effects of Blake's choices, as well analysing a wider range of poetic methods, such as poetic form, versification and rhythm and rhyme. At this level of engagement, candidates often had a secure understanding of relevant contexts and were able to integrate them into their essays seamlessly.
- (b) This was a very popular choice of question. Weaker answers often paraphrased the poem, showing a basic knowledge of the meaning and often a limited understanding of Blake's concerns. Better answers, whilst struggling with the point of view of the narrative, were able to comment on religion and the social context. For example, 'Blake paints how the children had to act mature and skilful in order to survive the harsh living conditions.' There was also personal engagement, with sympathy and at times pity, for the children's plight. More competent essays were able to look beyond the poem and appreciate Blake's bigger picture. Some took a more jaundiced view and, for example, found the last two lines cynical, even nauseating. 'This is a false promise; only death will free the children', as one candidate argued. Most responses at this level responded personally to the first two stanzas but generally offered more conventional 'Christian' readings of the Angel, 'for life is hard but, if we all do our duty and obey authority, we'll be rewarded in Heaven', as one response summarised it. Stronger answers made excellent use of what they knew about context and were thus able to separate Blake's attitude towards organised religion and his own visionary Christianity, implicit in the poem. At this level, those who referenced the Experience poem or were clearly aware of it, usually offered a much more critical and nuanced reading, acknowledging Blake's view of childhood's essential innocence but noting that the criticism of society was presented indirectly in the last stanza. Other stronger responses focused on Blake's anger toward a system that 'offers only illusory hope and the way it tricks the children to endure suffering with the promise of heaven', which Blake implies is a manipulation. There were some excellent analyses of Blake's poetic methods at this level: teasing out his use of different speakers, the shifting in tone between the two parts of the poem, his use of language to create empathy and the 'nursery rhyme like versification' were all popular discussion points. Other responses consider the imagery, noting the Christian implications of the shorn lamb, for example. The most successful responses analysed the effects of such poetic methods in detail, blending quotation from the wider text with specific examples from the given poem, often in effective and well-structured arguments.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

- (a) This was a minority choice of question on *Songs of Ourselves*, with nearly every candidate able to select relevant poems on which to base their essay. Some very weak essays used the given poem from the (b) question, with a consequent limitation on their overall success. Popular pairings of poems were *Father Returning Home with an afternoon nap*, *In the Park* with *The Lost Woman...* and *The Buck in the Snow* with *Renouncement*. Basic answers tended to retell their chosen poems, nearly always with a basic understanding of the meaning and some ability to shape ideas to address

the question. More competent answers were fully focused on the task for 'Memory is a fundamental basis for any poem', as one candidate suggested before alluding to Wordsworth's famous aphorism about 'recollection, tranquillity and memory'. Choosing contrasting poems helped candidates structure their essays effectively. For some candidates 'memories are often sad or painful', so the effects 'on poet and reader are usually negative', as one essay argued. But those who found contrasting poems were led into more analytical appreciation, for example 'how Wordsworth depicts his "Phantom of Delight" as a positive fulfilling memory, compared to Harwood's memories of her lost lover'. Another strong response noted Arthur Yap 'peering through a window at his younger self' and contrasting it to 'Dilip Chitre perhaps regretting the way he treated his father', with the sense of loss encapsulated by the poet's speaking of 'stolen childhood' and 'stolen fatherhood'. Strong answers focused on how the poet presented the memories in order to create effects. Popular discussion points were language, poetic form (with one candidate exploring how Harwood's use of the sonnet form 'adds a sharp poignancy to her memories of a lost lover') and the poetic voice. This last was a particularly productive point of analysis, 'contrasting the use of first and third-person speakers to evaluate the depth and sincerity of the emotions evoked by the memories', as one candidate argued. Where such points were supported by close reference to the text and some contextual underpinning, as appropriate, the essays did very well.

- (b) This was the most popular question in the poetry section and all but a very few weaker responses had at least a basic knowledge of the poem's meaning and a basic understanding of Carew's concerns. Very weak responses seemed to be responding to the poem as an unseen, often lacking understanding of the overall meaning and structure of the poem. Basic responses were able to pick up the joys of spring, but only better answers at this level could see the contrast between 'the rebirth of spring and the poet's depression over his lover', as one candidate noted. Weaker responses were limited in their comments on literary features. For example 'spring is a fresh start' but Carew presents it 'as a metaphor for what his lover's heart lacks', as one candidate suggested. Some made general points explaining techniques rather than exploring the possible meanings. Some structured their essays around 'feature spotting', often noticing examples of alliteration or caesura or rhyme without offering any analysis of the features. Nearly every response at this level did understand and discuss the message of the last line, with some engaged personal commentaries. More competent responses explored the fact that it was also about a cold-hearted lover, which 'explained the change in mood in the poem', as one suggested. There were also some sound discussions recognising that 'winter has its charms too, not simply spring good and winter bad', for, as one candidate noted 'despite her being locked into January he still wants his lover'. Stronger responses were confident in exploring a wide range of Carew's poetic methods. For some candidates, 'Carew uses the soft assonance to add an uplifting musical tone to move to the beat of spring's natural orchestra', as one argued. Others analysed the 'powerful paradox reinforcing her indifference to nature's transformative seasonal cycles', while some good responses argued that he uses 'pastoral, idyllic descriptions of public love to further emphasise the speaker's private despair' and so to 'show Spring's limited control over love'. The most successful responses were wide ranging in their analysis of poetic methods, with some detailed commentaries on the effects of balance and antithesis in heroic couplets, for example. The strongest essays did not separate the transition to spring from winter and the poet's love life but saw the implications of his heartache throughout the poem, even in the joyful celebration of the rebirth of spring. Where such arguments were supported by close analysis of the poem and some appreciation of appropriate contexts, the answers did very well.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/13 Drama and Poetry

Key messages

- 1 Candidates need to develop analysis beyond a checklist approach to reach the higher levels of assessment.
- 2 Many successful essays have a clearly organised and purposeful structure.

General comments

The large majority of candidates this session showed at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. There were almost no rubric errors 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 still some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level. There were responses to nearly all of the questions on the paper. Answers reflecting a wide range of performance were seen on most of the texts attempted by the candidates, with the most popular choices being *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in **Section A: Drama**, the selection from *Songs of Ourselves* in **Section B: Poetry** and *The Underground Railroad* in **Section C: Prose**.

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

- 1 Many candidates, particularly, though not exclusively, when answering **(b)** passage questions, adopt a checklist approach when considering the writer's style. For example, in poetry essays the plan will list caesura, rhyme, alliteration and metaphor. The candidate will give one or two examples of these methods in the essay proper, often appropriate and with supporting quotation, but without any analysis of how these methods work or contribute to the poetic meaning. Nor is there any commentary on the effects of these methods on the reader or on the audience. This is a limited approach to literary analysis and more successful responses always integrate perceptive commentary of the writer's choices into their overall argument.
- 2 Assessment Objective 4 from the Literature in English syllabus states that candidates should 'communicate a relevant, structured and supported response'. Many candidates would improve the overall success of their essays by having a clear structure in mind before starting to write, incorporating an appropriate and focused introduction, a purposeful argument and a controlled apt conclusion. This will often be the consequence of some 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.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

- (a) There were too few responses to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) There were only a few responses to this question. Weaker answers retold Sophia's story in detail, showing basic knowledge, though with only intermittent focus on the task. Better answers at this level noted her interaction with the other characters 'which brought out how important she is to the community', as one candidate wrote. More competent responses were able to analyse John's methods, principally his characterisation of Sophia through her relationships, with some responses at this level considering language and action. Her various roles as a mother, wife, friend and, for some candidates, a leader were identified and exemplified. Only a very few responses were confident enough to consider the effects of John's dramatic choices, with some candidates appreciating the shifting tone and mood of the passage, 'from comic and light to quite threatening as the robbery is discussed'. This enabled responses at this level to show at least sound understanding, particularly those who remembered the actual perpetrator of the robbery and what that would mean to Sophia and her family.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

- (a) Nearly every response was able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers focused exclusively on Angelo and the Duke, summarising what each character did, with more successful answers at this level recognising their role in the development of the play's action. Better answers were able to compare and contrast the two leaders, with many candidates recognising 'how they are in some ways very similar in manipulating those around them to get their own way', as one essay suggested. Essays at this level often had secure and detailed knowledge of the play on which to base their interpretations. More competent answers often ranged more widely in the text, with Escalus, the provost and even Mistress Overdone well discussed. Other responses at this level adopted a more thematic approach, considering what elements of leadership each of the characters did (or did not) display. Manipulation and hypocrisy were common discussion points and, for many candidates, though 'Angelo's actions are more abhorrent and criminal, he is at least driven by his unexpected desire for Isabella', whereas the Duke was 'simply hiding behind his disguise and using it to manipulate Isabella and Mariana to control the events in Vienna'. Stronger answers looked closely at 'Shakespeare's dramatic exploration', often noticing the contrasts between the different leaders, Escalus and Angelo, for example, and their attitudes to wrongdoing. These responses also often considered Shakespeare's use of soliloquy, particularly in 'shading the audience's response to Angelo, clearly deeply troubled by his reaction to Isabella', as well as the Duke, whose 'desire to do good does in some way mitigate his meddling and cruelty to Isabella over Claudio', as one essay argued. The most successful answers were able to develop such argument with detailed and apposite reference to the text, often exploring Shakespeare's choice of language and imagery – 'Angelo's legalistic self-justifications' and 'the Duke's fake religious arguments and imagery'. Where such responses integrated appropriate contextual understanding into their arguments the responses often did very well.
- (b) This was a popular choice and nearly every candidate was able to place the passage into its textual context. Weaker answers tended to summarise the situation in detail, with some led into too much background detail in explaining what was happening. The relationship between Mariana and Angelo was the main focus in nearly every response and candidates were alive to the dramatic irony of 'the audience knowing who the veiled woman is, though Angelo and most of those on stage do not', as one essay suggested. More competent responses were able to follow the various 'twists and turns of the plot as we wait for Angelo to be exposed', with many candidates focusing on the 'Duke's unexpected siding with Angelo against Mariana and the Friar'. Candidates who remembered that Isabella has already been arrested and taken away on the Duke's orders were able to explore this latest development more successfully. Stronger answers considered the dramatic action in detail, the 'kneeling woman, the unveiling and Angelo's likely visible shock', were discussed in detail at this level. Other responses analysed the Duke, how from the 'shambling

mysterious friar he is likely to be now authoritative and commanding', with some exploring possible contrasts 'between him here and in the play's opening' as well as in this scene between him and Angelo. Very good answers analysed some of Shakespeare's methods perceptively. For example, the 'effects of the comic exchange between the Duke and Lucio', and the threatening tone of Escalus's 'we'll do it thoroughly', whereas others thought 'the exit of the Duke, leaving Mariana and by extension Isabella to the vengeance of Angelo', as 'deeply shocking'. Some essays remembered 'Angelo's self-justification for carrying on with Claudio's execution and what that might bode for the women if he is their judge', as one essay argued. The strongest answers kept their focus on the detail of the passage, with some offering sophisticated analyses of the dramatic methods, as well as controlled and thoughtful links from the passage to the rest of the play.

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

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

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

- (a) This was a popular question but very much the minority choice on the Williams play. Nearly every response was able to select relevant parts of the text with which to address the task. Popular choices were Big Daddy's cancer diagnosis, Brick's relationship with Skipper and Maggie's claims of pregnancy near the end of the play. Weaker answers tended to summarise this material, often showing basic knowledge and understanding of why those particular deceptions were important to the characters and, in more successful answers, to the play as a whole. Better answers at this level were able to identify 'different kinds of deception', for example 'Brick's self-deception and Maggie's straightforward lies have contrasting motivations', which, as one candidate suggested 'could be hiding the truth from yourself or from others in the family'. More competent responses developed such ideas in terms of the dramatic methods used by Williams, with the various 'intense dialogues between the warring family members', often discussed. Other sound answers considered the stage directions and how 'Williams uses them to ensure the audience is fully aware of the effects of deception', as one candidate noted, with the violence shown by Big Daddy and Brick often cited as examples of how 'deception poisons all the relationships and leads to a complete lack of trust and understanding throughout the family', as one essay argued. More successful responses explored the nuances of the different kinds of deception in depth, comparing, for example, Brick's attitude to Skipper with Big Mama's 'wilful disbelief in the truth about how Big Daddy feels about her', as one candidate noted. There were many interesting interpretations about the motives for deceiving Big Daddy about his cancer. Some considered it 'positive in not wanting to spoil the party', as opposed to others who saw only 'malicious self-interest and the desire to position themselves to get the inheritance.' Very good responses were always very confident in using textual knowledge to support their arguments, with a sustained focus on Williams's methods and their effects. The most popular choices for discussion were stage directions, language and the use of the setting and symbols, with some candidates showing sophisticated understanding of the effects of Williams's use of plastic theatre.
- (b) Nearly every response seemed to enjoy the opportunity to offer their views of Maggie, often seen as the 'most interesting character in the play'. Weaker answers summarised what happened to her in the play, often showing detailed knowledge and some basic understanding of her characterisation. In some cases, too much time was spent on explaining textual contexts with a consequent lack of attention on the detail of the passage. Better answers at this level had a basic understanding of her relationship with Brick, her desire for his attention and her 'disgust at her nephews and nieces', as one essay suggested. More competent responses explored the nuances of her character in detail: her way of talking and what that revealed about her, for example, was often discussed, along with her 'attractiveness and desirability', as one candidate noted. More successful responses analysed some of Williams's dramatic methods. Stage directions and language were popular discussion points and as the responses became more analytical, they became increasingly successful. Stronger answers nearly always explored the dramatic qualities of the scene, noting how 'Williams's use of setting, action and symbols, such as her dresses, all create this tense and yet intriguing atmosphere', as one candidate summarised it. Other strong responses considered the dialogue, analysing the effects of 'Brick's monosyllabic responses on both Maggie and the audience's view of her', as one candidate wrote. Very good responses

developed such ideas, particularly aware of tone and mood, with some responses exploring 'the intriguing effects from the sensual and sexual undercurrents of two beautiful, semi-naked actors on a dimly lit stage at the start of the play', though other candidates at this level were also alive to the 'humour of the situation and the dialogue'. Such interpretations that focused on the passage and the task, as well as appropriately linking the concerns and characterisation to the wider play, nearly always did very well.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

- (a) Very few responses were seen on this question. The most popular poems chosen were *Momma Welfare Roll*, *To Beat the Child Was Bad Enough* and *Woman Work*. Weaker answers summarised the content of their selected poems, often showing at least a basic knowledge and understanding of their meaning. Appropriate selection of relevant poems was crucial to developing a competent response and enabled some sound arguments about the ways in which Angelou presented relationships. Her use of different speakers, contrasting verse forms and choices of language and imagery were popular discussion points and candidates who were able to support their points with accurate quotation from the poems did well. Only a handful of candidates was confident enough to consider the effects of Angelou's choices but those that did showed some thoughtful analytical skills, particularly in teasing out nuances of meaning.
- (b) This was the second most popular choice in the poetry section. Weaker answers tended to summarise the poem with little reference to the specifics of the question, though often revealing a basic knowledge and understanding of Angelou's concerns. Her attitudes to racism and black culture generally were at least implicitly discussed in essays at this level, though a few candidates drifted into recounting biographical context and thereby limiting their focus on the poem and the task. More competent responses were able to explain many of the cultural references in the poem, 'as Angelou lays out the breadth and depth of black culture across a wide range of activities', as one candidate summarised it. Food, music and politics were common discussion points, though some responses at this level did not reference the rest of the poem, in which the range is broadened and developed. At this level there was always understanding of some of Angelou's poetic methods, with language and rhythm the most commonly referenced. Essays became more successful as the range of poetic methods that were discussed widened. For example, there were some confident analyses of 'how Angelou uses the rhymes to drive the ideas forward in an almost dance-like way', as one candidate argued. Other good responses noticed the use of personal pronouns, 'so that the focus shifts from the speaker to the icons of black culture and eventually to the reader and "your lover" and then the whole world', as one candidate suggested. At this level, there was often a secure knowledge of the rest of the poem and the wider selection, with apposite quotation used to evidence the analytical points made. Strong answers were comfortable in exploring the effects of Angelou's choices, with close reading of the poem often supported by telling quotation and appropriate contextual insights.

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) This was a popular choice overall and nearly every candidate had at least a basic knowledge of the poem and some understanding of the significance of this passage. Some weaker answers were unsure of the precise context, though aware there were a 'series of tests of his chivalry that Gawain is subjected to', as one essay noted. Better answers at this level explored the role of the lady as a temptress here, though occasionally slipping into a summary of all of the 'tests' and the 'wager with Lord Bertilak'. More competent answers discussed why the girdle is 'so important in terms of the plot and Gawain's characterisation', with some critical of his weakness in accepting it. Others argued that 'the accepting of the gift was fine but not giving it to the lord was the real disloyal act', as one candidate argued. Essays at this level had sound understanding of Armitage's methods, with the lady's tone and language being popular points of analysis. Others noted how the 'secret agreed between them is reflected by a change in tone, conspiratorial now rather than open as

before', as one candidate noted. Good answers analysed how Armitage presents the lady's change in strategy through her words and actions, as she becomes 'desperate to catch Gawain out in this her last opportunity with him'. Strong answers were confidently able to explore the significance of the exchange and the girdle itself, as a 'symbol of Gawain's weakness, especially as an intimate item of female clothing', as one essay suggested. Only a few strong responses were confident enough to explore Armitage's alliterative verse in detail, though there were some perceptive analyses of its effects in terms of the tone and the mood created. Answers at this level always had a clear grasp of the context and were able to connect the passage appropriately to the wider text.

Question 7

WILLIAM BLAKE: Selected Poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

- (a) There were very few responses to this question, though nearly every response selected relevant poems with which to address the task. Weaker responses tended to summarise their chosen poems with only implicit awareness of the whether 'emotions were stirred' or not. Popular choices of poem were both *The Chimney Sweeper* poems, *Little Boy Lost*, *The Tyger*, *London* and *Spring*, though one or two responses were limited through using the given poem in the passage. More competent responses explained how their chosen poems stirred the emotions, often soundly linking arguments by reference to appropriate contexts and showing secure understanding of Blake's concerns. One candidate suggested that 'Blake in fact only wrote when his own emotions were stirred by some injustice, so he was bound to stir his reader's emotions.' Common discussion points were religion and hypocrisy, social injustice, treatment of children and education with most candidates offering engaged personal responses, sensitive to Blake's concerns and finding relevance in them to their own twenty-first century worlds. Stronger answers explored Blake's poetic choices, particularly language, imagery and symbols, and where this was supported by specific examples from the poems, the answers did well. The few essays that reached the highest level always explored the effects of Blake's choices, integrating textual and contextual support seamlessly into a well-structured interpretation.
- (b) This was the more popular choice of question on Blake and work was seen at all levels of assessment. Weaker responses were able to explain the situation but struggled with the meaning and some of the references, for example the beads. Better answers at this level had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of Blake's concerns. For example, one candidate suggested 'the church is supposed to be the holiest, but God and Blake know this isn't true', though in weaker responses there was a tendency to take the poem at face value. More competent responses questioned his presentation of the beads, for example, 'the greyness, whiteness and wands suggest he wants to cast doubt on their benevolence', as one candidate argued. Stronger answers explored the presentation of the river, often seeing ambiguity: 'it should be literally and figuratively "pure" and "clean" and hence a visual juxtaposition between the external clean faces and appearance, with its internal sewage'. At this level, there was a confident grasp of relevant contexts and some ability to link this poem to the wider text, though one or two responses were too distracted by other poems, with a consequent loss of focus. Successful responses considered the imagery in detail. Candidates often noted the lamb in the poem and discussed it with varying success from 'the lamb is a recurring metaphor in Blake's poems', to 'Blake describes the children as a "multitude of lambs", a divine symbol of purity, innocence and even Jesus himself.' The strongest responses always considered the effects of Blake's choices, whether in language or versification, whilst supporting their arguments with apposite quotation and specific and relevant context.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

- (a) There were only a few responses seen to this question, with nearly every candidate able to select two relevant poems on which to base their response. *The Buck in the Snow*, *Growing Old*, *Australia 1970*, *In the Park* and *Surplus Value* were popular choices, the last two chosen by candidates who saw that 'death' could be figurative as well as literal. Weaker responses summarised the content of the poems, often showing basic knowledge and understanding but with little sense of the poetry. More competent responses offered commentaries on the speakers' reactions to death, without fully analysing how the poet in fact presented it. For example, writing on *The Buck in the Snow*, one candidate suggested that 'the poet gave the impression of having never directly experienced death before and not knowing what to think of it'. Other essays contrasted the presentations as 'cold and

colourless' or 'savage and violent'. Stronger essays saw that death might be presented as an escape or 'a means of gaining freedom', though others considered that 'people were showing their wild nature and dying like animals', as one suggested. Those taking death in a more figurative sense were able to find some insightful arguments, whether it was 'the death of hope for the mother in *In the Park*' or 'the brother-in-law's decline into poverty and misery as his world crumbled around him', as one candidate put it. Very few candidates were confident in analysing poetic methods, beyond language and imagery, though those that did consider poetic form and versification, for example, especially where points were supported by apposite quotations, did very well.

- (b) This was the most popular question in the poetry section, with answers seen at every level of performance. Weaker answers were unsure of some of the contextual background, for example, missing the monsoon reference and thus mistaking the muddy trousers and dark hands as the stigma of the working class. More basic responses were able to discuss the father's state of mind, though often ignoring his family and the dream of his ancestors and descendants. Many at this level commented on the father's sacrifice exemplified by the 'stale chapati' and 'weak tea' suggesting 'he consumed them, leaving better food for the family', which in more competent responses linked into contextual reading of the father's job and country. Many sound responses used their knowledge of Chitre's life to explain the poem, with telling references to Mumbai urban development at the time of the author's childhood. For example, commenting on 'the relation of poet and father and his enlightenment only on reflection, with regret and possible shame, of his father's struggles and unhappiness', as one candidate summarised it. Stronger responses abandoned a linear structure, adopting a structure based on an often-penetrating analysis of the context and the nature of the father's alienation from his family. This was supported in confident responses by secure analysis, especially of language and imagery. For example: 'the bag falling apart could be a metaphor for the man himself,' and 'the simple details about the household and the commute reflect the struggles and hardships of the father's life.' Stronger responses also considered the narrative voice, 'for Chitre's retrospective gaze is giving voice and dignity, where authentic understanding is only to be arrived at with maturity', as one candidate argued. At this level, candidates were alive to Chitre's depiction of 'a man-made world contrasted to the traditions of the past', as well as the effects of some of his poetic choices: 'this kinaesthetic imagery serves to highlight the father's stagnation in his mind even though he is still moving', according to one. The most successful responses blended understanding of the poem's meaning, with astute contextual awareness and analytical insight producing a well-informed and thoughtful interpretation.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/21 Prose and Unseen

Key messages

- Successful responses focus on the writing of the texts and how the writer shapes the meaning and content to the reader.
- Responses which rely on narrative summary are not successful.
- Successful responses to **(a)** questions use analysis of specific references and quotations to support their points.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions focus securely on detailed analysis of the writing of the selected extract.
- In **Section B: Unseen**, successful responses engage closely with the text type's literary features, discussing how they communicate the meaning and contribute to the reader's or audience's understanding of the passage or poem.

General comments

There was a good number of responses to all the prose texts, though the popularity of each differed according to the variant. While responses to passage-based questions dominated, Examiners read many thoughtful answers to **(a)** questions. While no text is provided on the examination paper for these questions, many candidates were able to recall accurately key episodes from their texts which were relevant to the question, shaping their essays carefully. The most successful responses demonstrated careful selection of specific details, including key quotations, which allowed the candidates to address the writers' language and methods. Successful answers to **(b)** questions focus on the writing of the selected passage, considering ways in which the writers present their characters or concerns. Strong answers are often informed by the candidate's knowledge of the rest of the text, using wider references to develop points about aspects of the writing, characterisation or significance of the selected extract.

To be successful in the Unseen section, candidates need a wide prior experience of the key features of poetry, prose and drama texts from different historical periods. They need to be able to discuss poetic techniques accurately, but with a convincing sense of their effect on the reader, as merely noting which methods are employed is of little benefit. For prose passages, successful responses consider not only the effects of language and imagery, but narrative techniques and narrative perspective. For drama passages, a good grounding in dramatic methods and conventions, drawn from 9695 Papers 11-13, is invaluable.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Prose

Question 1

KIRAN DESAI: *The Inheritance of Loss*

- (a)** Very few candidates tackled the question on Jemubhai and his role. The answers which examiners saw showed knowledge of the text in the accounts of the Judge's character and actions, though focus on Desai's presentation was usually less developed. Most candidates were able to recount Jemubhai's journey to England and his experiences of university life, while more paid attention to his professional life in India, his adherence to English values and his distaste for Indian culture. Many candidates wrote about his abuse of his wife Nimi. Fewer paid attention to his family's focus on his early education and the decline of Cho Oyu, though several remarked that his closest relationship in the novel is with Mutt, his dog. Another key episode to which several candidates

referred was the lost powder puff, though few developed its full significance. Jemubhai was seen in many of the responses as a product of colonialism, noting that Desai suggests that his education leads directly to his sense of the superiority of English customs and values and the denigration of India and Indian traditions. A few noted the kinds of dishes which the cook prepares for him as one of the signs of this, though more recognised the way this underpins his disregard for his wife and his abuse of her, which many candidates found to be highly shocking. Very few candidates explored the paradox which Desai presents in Jemubhai's promotion of the values of a country where he felt continuously isolated and disregarded, and frequently more could have been made of his relationship with Sai.

- (b) About twice the number of candidates who answered **1(a)** attempted **1(b)**, which focused on a passage describing some of Biju's experiences delivering restaurant food in New York. However, several of the responses showed a lack of textual knowledge, as quite a number did not know that New York was the setting, and some placed it in India. This had a significant impact on the level of understanding shown and demonstrated how unwise it is to attempt a **(b)** question without thorough knowledge of the text from which the passage is taken. More successful answers noted the sensual descriptions of cheap food at the opening, though few noted the cultural mix of cuisines. In the same way, while several candidates commented on the description of busy traffic, few picked up that Desai uses language about it drawn from overeating – 'heaving buses, regurgitating taxis' and 'sounds of flatulence'. Not many noted either the significance that the drivers who 'harassed Biju' are also immigrants from India, though there were comments on the physicality of 'pounded', 'bucking' and 'blows', and some noted Desai's playful use of typography to indicate oncoming noise at the end of the first paragraph. The Indian girls to whom Biju delivers food were often misunderstood and few noted Desai's ironic presentation of their precarious place in society, as they are 'vehemently siding with the poor people who wished them gone'. A few noted how Desai characterises the girls through the repetition of the adjective 'shiny', though several wrote about their smiling welcome to Biju. These answers missed the separation which Desai draws between Biju and the girls in their comfortable apartment and 'luck in money and exams'. More attention needed to be paid to the dialogue, conducted in Biju's hearing but not involving him, dismissing a date with 'an Indian boy' in favour of 'the Marlboro man with a PhD.' More successful responses explored ways in which Desai communicates Biju's alienation in the passage, which is emphasised by the fact that it is Indian immigrants who are established in America who harass or ignore him.

Question 2

Stories of Ourselves Volume 1

- (a) There were few responses to this question, but those candidates who selected it chose to write about stories such as *The Son's Veto*, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, *The People Before* and *To Da-duh, in Memoriam*. Candidates explored Shadbolt's comparison of attitudes to the land in *The People Before*, discussing the Maoris' deep spiritual connection to the landscape and the farmer's disillusion with farming and desire to sell his land. Discussion of Hardy's story often included thoughtful exploration of how the rural village of Gaymead becomes more idyllic in retrospect when Hardy contrasts it with Sophy's experience in urban London. There were some interesting comments on the rural isolation of the house in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, but with this story candidates struggled to develop the presentation of life in such areas. *To Da-duh In Memoriam* provided more fertile ground for discussion, as candidates explored the grandmother's pride in the landscape and her own garden and crops in Barbados, which Marshall contrasts with New York.
- (b) Most candidates who had studied the short stories chose to answer the question on the passage from *The Yellow Wallpaper*. The answers usually showed good knowledge of the story, with discussion of the narrator's breakdown and post-partum depression. However, close detailed discussion of Perkins Gilman's writing in the passage was often less developed, with infrequent examination of the short paragraphs and sentences. A number of essays, however, noted the repetition of the phrase 'Dear John' noting that the endearment suggests the narrator's affection and respect for her husband. Some candidates took this at face value, referring also to her acknowledgment of John's care with his administering of 'cod-liver oil and lots of tonics', the fact that he 'gathered me up in his arms' and her statement that 'he is so wise, and... loves me so.' These details do indeed suggest that the narrator's attitude to her husband is one of love and gratitude. However, stronger and more subtle responses noted other elements in the passage which undermine this and lead the reader to question the veracity of that attitude. Such answers noted the way that the narrator also acknowledges John's restriction of her expression, though she

feels that she '*must* say what I feel and think', the italics emphasising the urgency. Similarly, he dismisses her ideas as 'silly fancies' and refuses to take her away from the oppressive house. There is a strong note of possession too in 'his darling and his comfort' and that she must get well 'for his sake', indicating that the narrator is at least subconsciously aware of her husband's control of her life. Confident candidates discussed how Perkins Gilman uses the tension between the narrator's explicit and implicit attitudes to her husband to show her mental decline, which is communicated in the staccato structures of the narration.

Question 3

EVELYN WAUGH: *A Handful of Dust*

- (a) *A Handful of Dust* was not a popular text in this variant and not many candidates chose this question. Candidates were able to identify 'dreadful situations' in the novel, with particular focus on John Andrew's death, the failure of Tony and Brenda's marriage, Tony's abandonment in Brazil and the loss of Hetton. Discussion of 'social comedy' was usually less successful, with candidates tending to rely on assertions of comedy and irony without close examination of how Waugh achieves the humour. The most confident responses demonstrated awareness of the dual nature of Waugh's comedy, being both amusing and painful, looking, for example, at responses to John Andrew's death, with Brenda's reaction and the card-playing scene between Tony and Mrs Rattery. The collapse of the marriage was discussed, with reference to the characterisation of Beaver as a dull nonentity, the staged divorce proceedings in Brighton and Reggie's attempts at negotiation.
- (b) Some candidates tackled the question on Hetton's bedrooms without knowledge of the novel and the resulting lack of context led to limited success. Other responses worked through the passage giving a descriptive account of it without developing the implications. More confident answers noted that the bedroom names, drawn from Arthurian legend, indicate Tony's interest in the past. Some noted the comic inappropriateness of Morgan le Fay, an enchantress, for Tony's room, and the appropriateness of Guinevere, a queen known for infidelity, for Brenda. A number of essays picked up on the phrase 'They were not in the fashion' to show that Tony's interest in the past is limiting and separates him from the society around him. While several answers noted the indication of decay, where 'damp had penetrated into one corner' and 'the wooden laths had become warped', fewer noted that the appearance of age is a pastiche and not genuinely historical, the woodwork just creating 'an appearance of coffered wood', which makes Tony's fear of being unable to find 'craftsmen capable of such delicate work' ironic. More suggested that Tony's continuing use of a bedroom which 'had been his room since he left the night nursery' suggests a state of arrested development and infantilism in Waugh's characterisation of Tony, emphasised by the collection of toys, posters and other paraphernalia from his childhood hobbies.

Question 4

COLSON WHITEHEAD: *The Underground Railroad*

- (a) A very small number of candidates were hampered in their response to this question by confusing South and North Carolina, two very different states in the novel. Examiners gave credit for any relevant wider points about oppression and the challenges faced by Black Americans, but these answers were invariably limited. Other answers, which correctly identified the state, sometimes discussed it in general terms as a location of horrific abuse of Black people, with reference to the Freedom Trail. Without sustained detailed reference, such responses tended to be straightforward. Successful answers drew on specific elements from this section of the novel, considering how much Martin is an anomaly in his society. Candidates who were able to refer in detail to the presentation of the Freedom Trail and to parts of the Friday Night Ceremonies wrote thoughtful and developed essays, showing how the state represents an extremity of attitudes towards Black people of a different type from the brutal direct oppression of slavery in Georgia. A small number of candidates considered the presentation of North Carolina with particular subtlety, considering that most of the reader's understanding of the state comes through Cora's perspective and observation made from her cramped position in the attic of Martin's house.
- (b) The passage presenting Cora's and Caesar's escape was a popular option and many candidates wrote well about ways in which Whitehead creates tension for both the fugitives and Fletcher. Many noted that the third person narration focalises Cora's perspective, experiencing the ride in the cart through sounds rather than through sight. Some candidates noted that the passage begins with deceptive comfort, with 'silent', 'nestled' and 'sunlight', before this is disturbed by Cora's 'vision' of

the boy she hit with the rock and her conviction that 'They were going to be killed whether he woke or not.' They also observed that Whitehead increases the tension with the 'noise' and 'mad chatter of a disembodied mob'. The stopping of the cart and Cora's expectation of exposure were noted, and many commented on the oxymoron 'roaring sunlight'. Cora's imagining of the likely results of discovery in ll. 15–18 was explored effectively in a number of answers and most candidates commented on the proximity of Fletcher's friend who 'leaned against the cart' and Fletcher's ironic expression of 'gratitude'. Fewer candidates commented on the proliferation of rumour exaggerating the fugitives' crimes, but most noted the easing of tension at the end of the passage as they reach 'the quiet county road' and Cora 'dozed'. Confident candidates were able to place the passage with references to Cora's experience of slavery in Georgia and the altercation with the pig hunters. They noted that this passage marks Cora's transition to escaped slave travelling the underground railroad through different states in search of freedom.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 - Poetry

Approximately two thirds of candidates chose *Walk* for their Unseen response. Most read the poem as a gentle lament about the passage of time and the resulting changes in a relationship. The dark of 'night', the 'wet' and the 'cold' were seen as pathetic fallacy, creating a sorrowful, regretful tone, also indicated by the phrase 'sad ease'. Candidates selected a number of interesting details from the four stanzas for discussion, such as the repetition of 'past' in ll. 2–3, communicating the length of the walk, while the repetition of 'each known' reinforces the familiarity of the location. A number of essays focused on the nature of the relationship, noting the first-person narration with a single perspective, despite the 'we' in stanza 3. They commented that the apparent intimacy of 'hand in hand' in stanza 2 is undermined by 'we did not speak' and 'our hands grew cold'. Stanza 3, they argued, indicates a resigned acceptance, without 'words or tears' or 'rage'. Most candidates understood the 'forked years' as indicating the separate paths the friends have travelled since their earlier intimacy, though some suggested that the adjective could also suggest bitterness. At the end of the final stanza, 'the lights went out' was frequently interpreted as metaphoric as well as literal, indicating the end of the relationship, which becomes as insignificant as the identity of the occupants of the house. Some confident answers addressed the structure of the poem, suggesting that the tight alternately rhymed stanzas suggest a regularity and order at odds with the sense of loss in the poem, but consistent with its lack of open emotion. Candidates who worked closely with the meaning of the poem were most successful, whereas those who forced their own metaphorical readings, arguing a symbolic significance to every image, were much less successful. Some personal responses suggested that the poem represents a journey through life, the 'old friend' being life itself, and 'the lights went out' signifying death. These were interestingly argued, though the separation in the 'forked years' often proved to be a stumbling block.

Question 6 - Drama

Most candidates who answered on the drama passage appreciated the nature of the power play between Malcolm and Siward. Most responses noted the opening stage directions which identify Malcolm as king and in a physically superior position. The main thrust of the extract was understood by most candidates – that Siward challenges Malcolm's previous statements about the former queen which prove not to be true, which leads to Malcolm's long speech which subtly threatens Siward for calling him a liar. Candidates noted Siward's tactical retreat from his position and his diplomatic rephrasing of his 'mistaken understanding' before Malcolm's final little twist. There was a general understanding that Siward has little choice in his retreat, as Malcolm holds ultimate power and threatens 'a violent response'. While the dashes throughout Malcolm's speech were noticed in many answers, careful dissection of the language and structure of the dialogue was infrequent. A small number of responses noted that, apart from his long speech, Malcolm's contribution to the dialogue is made up of short sentences, phrases and even single words, which are often non-committal. Few noted that the weight of Siward's first accusation is emphasised in contrast by being a five-line speech of a single sentence, outlining the ways in which he has been deceived. Malcolm's main speech repaid careful analysis, to show how the pauses created by the dashes produce a studied apparent casualness as he communicates the 'small thing' which might 'demand a violent response'. The pauses create a kind of circumlocution as Malcolm gradually closes in on the key question: 'are you calling me a liar?' Few candidates noticed the way in which Malcolm's dialogue manoeuvres Siward by appearing to denigrate his own country's customs, which he says are 'infuriating' and 'silly', meaning that 'people have to pussyfoot around'. One essay compared him to a snake hypnotising its victim, and a very few identified a dangerous comedy in this speech, comparing its techniques with his equally dangerous 'Mmm.' A very few noted that it becomes apparent that Siward is not Scottish, and that Malcolm's speech also points out clear cultural differences. Siward is ignorant of Scottish customs but has learned enough to be able ironically to borrow the Scottish use of 'seem' in l. 42. Perceptive candidates noted that the last line of the scene,

following a lengthier pause indicated by the ellipsis, turns the whole extract around again and confirms Malcolm's dangerous, unscrupulous tactics.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/22 Prose and Unseen

Key messages

- Successful responses focus on the writing of the texts and how the writer shapes the meaning and content to the reader.
- Responses which rely on narrative summary are not successful.
- Successful responses to **(a)** questions use analysis of specific references and quotations to support their points.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions focus securely on detailed analysis of the writing of the selected extract.
- In **Section B: Unseen**, successful responses engage closely with the text type's literary features, discussing how they communicate the meaning and contribute to the reader's or audience's understanding of the passage or poem.

General comments

There was a good number of responses to all the prose texts, though the popularity of each differed according to the variant. While responses to passage-based questions dominated, Examiners read many thoughtful answers to **(a)** questions. While no text is provided on the examination paper for these questions, many candidates were able to recall accurately key episodes from their texts which were relevant to the question, shaping their essays carefully. The most successful responses demonstrated careful selection of specific details, including key quotations, which allowed the candidates to address the writers' language and methods. Successful answers to **(b)** questions focus on the writing of the selected passage, considering ways in which the writers present their characters or concerns. Strong answers are often informed by the candidate's knowledge of the rest of the text, using wider references to develop points about aspects of the writing, characterisation or significance of the selected extract.

To be successful in the Unseen section, candidates need a wide prior experience of the key features of poetry, prose and drama texts from different historical periods. They need to be able to discuss poetic techniques accurately, but with a convincing sense of their effect on the reader, as merely noting which methods are employed is of little benefit. For prose passages, successful responses consider not only the effects of language and imagery, but narrative techniques and narrative perspective. For drama passages, a good grounding in dramatic methods and conventions, drawn from 9695 Papers 11-13, is invaluable.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Prose

Question 1

KIRAN DESAI: *The Inheritance of Loss*

- (a)** Many responses to this question recognised that New York is presented as a contrast with Kalimpong, but there was a tendency to write in sweeping terms about globalisation and post colonialism without close references to how Desai presents New York or Biju's experiences in the city. It is very important that candidates use contextual knowledge selectively and relevantly in answering the question set. Examiners saw large numbers of essays which made little reference to any detail of the presentation of the city. Stronger responses noted that the city is emblematic of America and is first presented as a dream destination, a gateway to success and prosperity, but that Biju's experiences bring disillusionment and disappointment. Successful answers were based

on specific details and episodes, looking, for example, at Biju's succession of restaurant jobs and the culture of exploitation of immigrants in New York. Others looked at the signs of wealth and ease in the city from which Biju is excluded, and some essays contained thoughtful discussion of Saeed Saeed and ways in which Desai shows his assimilation of American values. Some candidates noted that Desai's presentation depends on Biju's perspective, shaping the reader's own response. They argued successfully that Biju's final return to Kalimpong represents not only his disillusion with New York, but his rejection of American values and his renewed embrace of his homeland and his identity.

- (b) Most candidates attempting this question understood the significance of the passage within the novel, relating it to other references to the GNLF and political upheaval in Bengal. While some candidates wrote about the passage descriptively or in general terms, more successful essays were based on careful reading of its development, moving from the opening anticipation of lunch to the shocking violence of the riot. Candidates who were prepared to engage with the details of Desai's writing did well, as they were able to analyse her use of onomatopoeia; the violent verbs such as 'pelted', 'beating' and 'bashing'; the employment of short percussive phrases like 'Bruises. Blood' matched by longer sentences of continuous action like ll. 23–26. The developing tension between the protesters and the police was recognised in most answers, but only the most successful carefully unpicked how Desai communicates the breakdown and descent into violence, balancing phrases like 'all parties agreed' with 'they claimed', 'a rumor spread' and 'So, they suspected.' In this way, Desai carefully and subtly puts the blame for the bloodshed onto the police, who 'opened fire' on the basis of 'their suspicion'. Some commented on the stark effectiveness of the brief paragraph on l. 38 reporting that 'thirteen local boys were dead', while the details of injury, mutilation and humiliation in the final paragraph drew some thoughtful comments. Some candidates picked up other details in the passage too, including the 'barred and shut' post office, so vital to the communications between the cook and Biju. There is much to explore in Desai's narrative techniques and use of language; an ability to deal with these in analytical detail was a key discriminator in response to the passage.

Question 2

Stories of Ourselves Volume 1

- (a) While there were not many responses to this question, *Billennium* was by far the most popular story considered. Other stories used included *Report on the Threatened City*, *The Son's Veto*, *Real Time*, and often less successfully, *To Da-duh, in Memoriam* and *The Prison*. Stronger answers depended on candidates being able to refer in detail to their chosen stories, selecting key aspects of their presentation of the cities and how they affect the lives of their inhabitants. While *Billennium* was clearly an appropriate choice, even this story was only successfully used when answers included details from the story, such as the difficulties even crossing the road, and the description of 'locks', including one involving 'over 20,000 people' over two days. While most candidates could refer to the cramped nature of Ward and Rossiter's room and their discovery of the bigger space, few were able to refer to details of the story more widely to analyse Ballard's presentation of life in the future city. The pattern was similar with other stories, with for example, focus on the aliens' quest in Lessing's story, without careful examination of how, though police and radio reports, she presents life in the city. A story which was often used successfully was *The Son's Veto*, where candidates were able to write about the constricted life which Sophy faces in her London house, especially when compared with her former life in Gaymead. It is very important that candidates remember to select key details from their chosen stories which are most directly relevant to the question, rather than relying on narrative summary of suitable stories.
- (b) This was by some margin the most popular question on the paper and many candidates appreciated the gentle melancholy of Thorpe's story. Those who were unaware of the rest of the story missed its haunting pathos and its foreshadowing of later tragic events, which limited their success. A number of candidates were also unaware of the context, with some assuming that Thorpe is the narrator, or that the story is set in the First World War, or that it takes place in England. Others were unaware of the identities of Dunlop and Michelin. Successful answers were well versed in this background and wrote well about the narrative voice which communicates the close relationship between the narrator and his father and the pride in the family business in a melancholic tone which is only explained at the end of the story. Candidates were able to discuss the way in which Thorpe presents the history of the business and its place in the community through the narrator's references to the development of roads and the use of old tyres in the vineyards. Many essays showed appreciation of his personification of the tyres, giving them a

playful sense of life, and there was thoughtful discussion of the father's professionalism and skill, particularly the metaphor of 'playing his accordion' to describe his handling of the tyres. Confident responses noted the emphasis the passage places on a meticulous approach to the work, particularly with the reference to the father's 'blessed Trinity' check. Here there was focused discussion of the ironies, with the references to the 'blood of small, hapless creatures', the dead 'shrew' and 'a local accident', all prefiguring the tyre failure which leads to Cécile's death later in the story. Some candidates suggested that the accident is a result of Raoul failing to carry out the meticulous check, when in fact the irony is that his shaving of the tyre is a different kind of meticulous calculation. Right up to the pathos of the wording of the sign in the last paragraph of the passage, this question offered candidates an opportunity to present a close detailed discussion of the narrative voice and presentation of detail in the extract itself, augmented by awareness of key aspects of the rest of the story.

Question 3

EVELYN WAUGH: *A Handful of Dust*

- (a) Examiners saw some engaging work on John Beaver. Most candidates were able to outline the central aspects of his character and his habits, such as sitting by the telephone waiting for invitations. They were able to place Beaver in the plot and to comment on his reception by the society surrounding him, such as acknowledging his usefulness in filling a space at a dinner party but trying to avoid him at the club. Most essays naturally focused on Beaver's role in the break-up of Tony and Brenda's marriage. While many candidates noted the advantages to Beaver in his relationship with Brenda, raising his reputation in society and giving him access to the moneyed world, few could understand his attractiveness to Brenda – here more could have been made of Waugh's satirical portrait of Brenda, with her shallowness and search for novelty. Some essays featured thoughtful discussion of Beaver's relationship with his mother, seeing him as essentially immature and lacking independence, and many noted the way Waugh withdraws Beaver from the novel, abandoning Brenda when she lacks money. Confident candidates demonstrated detailed knowledge of specific moments of the novel and were able to quote from it to support their points. A feature of very successful essays was the careful consideration of the question of role, exploring what candidates thought Beaver contributed to the larger social and moral concerns explored by Waugh.
- (b) Despite this passage being one of the comic set pieces of the novel, very few grasped the point of the vicar's inappropriate sermon, which although his 'usual' one, was clearly originally written in his time in colonial Africa. Those many candidates who wrote about the 'alien sun' of Hetton were required to ignore 'the ravening tiger and the exotic camel'. Not only did they struggle to make sense of the sermon, but they also missed discussion of one of Waugh's key satirical episodes. Other candidates found the sermon so puzzling that they ignored it and so failed to comment on a substantial part of the passage. Candidates fared better with other parts of the passage, commenting on the material social distinction of the 'strictly graded' servants' presents, and the first paragraph's listing of old-fashioned Christmas traditions with various indications of excess in the vocabulary, such as 'large croûte', 'torpid', 'silver ladles', and 'devoured'. Brenda's discomfort with the family's festivities was often noted, conscious as she is of the financial difference between her and the 'poor Lasts'. Though there certainly are images of discomfort and confinement which echo Brenda's feelings, many responses also showed misunderstanding of the final paragraph, not realising that the various actions to which Brenda is subjected are actually part of Christmas games – while she may be tortured by them, they are designed as fun. While the question on Beaver elicited responses which showed understanding of Waugh's methods, candidates opting for this passage question sometimes seemed unaware of his satire.

Question 4

COLSON WHITEHEAD: *The Underground Railroad*

- (a) There were some thoughtful and carefully constructed responses to the question on freedom. Confident responses considered different types of freedom, looking at physical freedom from slavery, freedom from prejudice and oppression and mental freedom, some arguing that ultimate freedom for a formerly enslaved person is almost impossible and that a country which enslaved other people would be never free from that history. Cora was usually seen as the embodiment of the quest for freedom in the novel, with some candidates commenting on the significance of her journey through different states, allowing Whitehead to explore different aspects of freedom or the

lack of it. Many answers showed appreciation of ways in which the novel takes the historical underground railroad routes to freedom and makes them physical, with rails, trains, tunnels and conductors in Whitehead's magical realism version. The Indiana section of the novel drew much comment, as candidates appreciated ways in which Whitehead presents it as an apparent ideal, offering freedom and a productive life to formerly enslaved people, but also fractured by tensions and ultimately destroyed by an attack by Ridgeway and other white Americans. Some were able to quote Lander's speech about 'one delusion: that we can escape slavery'. There were also comments about the risks and costs of obtaining freedom, with references to Cora's killing of the young pig hunter and Ridgeway. Some also recognised the significance of Cora's final journey on the underground railroad, working the pump of the handcar herself, independently driving towards her own destiny and possible freedom.

- (b) The significance of Cora's visit to Dr Stevens was clearly understood by most candidates who attempted this question and several compared it with her visit to Dr Campbell earlier in this section of the novel. While they recognised that Stevens is presented here as a friendlier, less intimidating doctor, being 'pleasant' and 'young' with 'black curls that verged on womanish', they also noted how Cora feels like a product on a conveyor belt. This leads to the gradual revelations of Stevens' and South Carolina's intentions. Strong responses confidently demonstrated how Whitehead reveals this through Stevens' dialogue, even though 'he smiled' and does not lose 'his warm demeanor'. His comments on 'dormitory life' and 'museum work' were noted and some candidates noted how there are further examples of how South Carolina controls the lives of its Black population. Examiners saw some careful discussion of the paragraph ll. 15–22, noting the clear simple description of the 'surgical technique' and the approbatory adjectives before the more sinister note that it 'had been perfected on the colored inmates of a Boston asylum', probably, as candidates noted, without consent. This is confirmed by Stevens' comment that it is 'mandatory for some in the state.' Many candidates demonstrated well-informed personal response as they explained the irony of Steven's assertion that he offers Cora the chance 'to take control over your own destiny.' Thoughtful answers noted that, having greater experience, including the earlier hospital visit, Cora now has more strength and determination and is able to question and reject the doctor's advice, though her walking 'briskly' down the corridor as it 'hungry for air' shows the effect of the interview on her. There was much comment on the final lines of the passage, many candidates condemning Stevens for his insensitivity and crass equating of rape with intimacy, missing the point that though Cora is horrified by the connection, Stevens is unaware of the nature of her 'intimate relations'. In placing this passage in context, few candidates referred to Stevens' other appearances and the Stevens chapter, which demonstrates a further example of his medical unscrupulousness.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 - Prose

Less successful responses offered summary or paraphrase of the passage, while more advanced responses commented on some of the language and other techniques as they worked through it. The strongest demonstrated a clear understanding of the developing situation described and explored a number of key aspects of the narrative style. The contrasting moods of the opening, 'Sim-la! Sim-la!', followed by 'smack', were nearly always noted, which led to some thoughtful discussion of the presentation of family dynamics in the car. On occasion, Examiners saw vigorous discussion of parenting styles beyond the passage, which is not the kind of literary personal response which can be rewarded. There was frequently, however, an appreciation of the writer's presentation of the cramped and crowded Ambassador car and there was sympathetic comment on the triumph of the smacked boy when he calls 'Accident!' More sophisticated answers discussed narrative voice, noting that the use of the third person narration allows an overview of the different perspectives of the members of the family and also juxtaposes the scene within the car with the details of the traffic jam outside it. The details of the traffic on the road allowed many opportunities for careful analytical discussion and many candidates discussed the writer's use of auditory language and imagery, not just in the traffic jam but throughout the passage. In the car, there is a 'chant' before the 'smack' then after 'sullen silence', 'the mother hissed' and the baby 'let out a wail'. In the traffic, there is the 'grinding' of both 'brakes' and 'gears', 'screeching brakes', a 'horn began to honk', a rickshaw 'began to clang its bell' and a truck 'blared its musical horn'. There were comments on the writer's use of sibilance and onomatopoeia, to which the 'pom-pom, pom-pom' and 'long piercing wail' could be added. A few candidates noted that the verb 'howled', applied to the father's 'wail', was a verb previously used for the son and the baby, thus infantilising the father in his tantrum. Observant essays noted that the final sentence suggests that the frustrating stasis seems likely to last for some time, adding to the family's frustrations.

Question 6 - Poetry

The poem proved to be a very popular option. Most candidates successfully grasped the central metaphor of the comparison of the world to a stage, noting the importance of the first line. However, many candidates would have benefited from spending some time planning how they were going to develop their reading of the poem. Successful answers explored the significance of the word 'acts' and examiners read some interesting discussion of the way in which God is presented first as the director, then as audience. Many responses noted the way the writer balances contrasting human roles within lines of pairs of lines, pairing, for example, 'honest man' and 'knave', 'chaste lady' and 'courtesan'. The poem prompted some interesting and thoughtful personal response, as some candidates discussed that the poem's insistence that people play 'their parts' undermines the concept of free will, making Jehove's actions in 'applaud[ing]' or assigning 'doom' manifestly unjust. Others suggested that the picture of the world created through the theatrical metaphor is one of artifice and falseness, with particular focus on the line 'she a chaste lady acteth all her life'. Firmly rooted in a close reading of the text, such personal interpretation was very successful. There was some observant comment about l. 20's euphemistic reference to death as an actor's 'part' being 'done', and a few noted the references to a physical theatre's 'star-galleries', while a small number suggested that the reference to 'roundness' implies a theatre like Shakespeare's Globe. Less confident responses lapsed into a description of the various images the poem presents without exploring their nuances. Reading the separate lines of the poem, rather than following the sense of the sentences, limited the responses of quite a large number of candidates. This often obscured their understanding of the meaning. Most noted that the poem is a single stanza, but a significant number asserted that it is written in free verse; others claimed that it was written in couplets throughout. Successful answers noted the development of the stanza though tight alternately rhymed lines in largely regular iambic pentameter, noting the shaping of ideas through enjambment, end-stopped lines and caesuras. While several noted the change in structure in the final indented couplet, very few attempted to interpret its meaning.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/23 Prose and Unseen

Key messages

- Successful responses focus on the writing of the texts and how the writer shapes the meaning and content to the reader.
- Responses which rely on narrative summary are not successful.
- Successful responses to **(a)** questions use analysis of specific references and quotations to support their points.
- Successful responses to **(b)** passage questions focus securely on detailed analysis of the writing of the selected extract.
- In **Section B: Unseen**, successful responses engage closely with the text type's literary features, discussing how they communicate the meaning and contribute to the reader's or audience's understanding of the passage or poem.

General comments

There was a good number of responses to all the prose texts, though the popularity of each differed according to the variant. While responses to passage-based questions dominated, Examiners read many thoughtful answers to **(a)** questions. While no text is provided on the examination paper for these questions, many candidates were able to recall accurately key episodes from their texts which were relevant to the question, shaping their essays carefully. The most successful responses demonstrated careful selection of specific details, including key quotations, which allowed the candidates to address the writers' language and methods. Successful answers to **(b)** questions focus on the writing of the selected passage, considering ways in which the writers present their characters or concerns. Strong answers are often informed by the candidate's knowledge of the rest of the text, using wider references to develop points about aspects of the writing, characterisation or significance of the selected extract.

To be successful in the Unseen section, candidates need a wide prior experience of the key features of poetry, prose and drama texts from different historical periods. They need to be able to discuss poetic techniques accurately, but with a convincing sense of their effect on the reader, as merely noting which methods are employed is of little benefit. For prose passages, successful responses consider not only the effects of language and imagery, but narrative techniques and narrative perspective. For drama passages, a good grounding in dramatic methods and conventions, drawn from 9695 Papers 11-13, is invaluable.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Prose

Question 1

KIRAN DESAI: *The Inheritance of Loss*

- (a)** The relationship between Sai and Gyan is central to the novel, but very few candidates opted for this question. Those who did choose it were usually well-informed, drawing on sound knowledge of the text. While many focused on the end of the relationship, more successful responses charted Desai's presentation of its development through the novel, choosing specific episodes to discuss. Gyan's early appearance as a 'quiet student of accounting' who makes Sai suddenly self-aware and considerate of her appearance was recalled, and some candidates wrote about the gradual growth of their affection, particularly their mutual physical exploration of 'Collar bones, eyelashes, and chins' and so on. The descent from that peak was noted and strong responses observed ways

in which Desai creates parallels between the relationship and the political events of the novel. There were references to Gyan's recruitment by the GNLF, his rejection of Sai and Indians like her as 'slaves ... running after the west', Sai's shock when she visits his home, and their physical confrontation. Successful answers depended on specific knowledge and the ability to look at particular episodes in detail; general discussion of the relationship without such references was not successful.

- (b) Many more candidates tackled the passage about the cook boasting to friends and acquaintances about Biju's life in America. While a few candidates were surprisingly condemnatory of the cook's boasting, more appreciated the gentle humour of Desai's characterisation of his fatherly pride. That love for his son is apparent in his memory of having 'prayed for Biju' at the Buddhist festival, a memory which helps him transcend the squalor of his surroundings in 'the greasy bus station' and the 'choking smell of exhaust'. Some candidates noted how Desai indicates that others participate in his pride and illusions, with the question 'When are you going?' and Tashi's dialogue with the cook. The simplicity of the cook's statements was often commented on, as well as his social pride that his son had achieved the same as the doctor's son, and his belief that Biju would 'accomplish all that Sai's parents had failed to do'. A few appreciated the little jokes incorporated by Desai, like 'nobody [at the cinema] would be interested in the cook's son' and the workers at 'Apollo Deaf Tailors', who 'would literally turn a deaf ear' to the cook's boasting. While some candidates condemned the sexism and misogyny of the cinema's films and Tashi's approach to 'foreign women', others noted that in some ways both the cinema and the travel agent are purveyors of false illusions, which parallel the cook's illusion about Biju's life in New York. Most candidates noted how the reader's awareness of Biju's difficulties creates an irony which underpins this passage, commenting that the cook's understanding arises from Biju's misleading letters, an extract from which is carefully included in II. 32–33.

Question 2

Stories of Ourselves Volume 1

- (a) There was a small number of answers to the question on the presentation of characters' hopes and dreams. Several different stories were considered in these responses, but the most successful in answering the question productively were *My Greatest Ambition*, *Games at Twilight*, *The Prison* and *Five-Twenty*. These essays often demonstrated knowledge of the stories through narrative recall, but attention to the authors' presentation of hopes and dreams was frequently undeveloped. Answers which were carefully focused considered the humour of the naïve first-person narration of *My Greatest Ambition*, by which the author reveals more to the reader than the narrator is aware of, and the third person narrator's close association with Ravi's situation in the shed in *Games at Twilight* and the demolition of his hopes at the end of the story. Thoughtful answers on *The Prison* noted that the flashbacks to Tommy's earlier life give the context and explanation for his attempts to help the girl, while on *Five-Twenty*, candidates noted the ways in which White creates sympathy for Ella through her own thoughts and the way that she is treated by Royal.
- (b) Many candidates wrote about *The People Before*, often with thoughtful understanding. Confident responses showed awareness of the narrative voice, recognising the significance of the son shaping the reader's response to his father. They discussed how the retrospective narration is clearly signalled in the second sentence and leads to a description of the end of a key passage in the family's life, when the father is 'too old to start again'. The narrator's closeness to his father, 'working on the farm all day' being 'what I'd always wanted', gives him a personal insight into his parent, and this, strong candidates argued, makes him particularly sensitive to his father's disillusionment. Candidates who read the passage closely picked up on the significance of phrases like 'I would have been happier if he had been' and the image of his father 'levering each year up like a stone'. Many candidates noted that the father's decline in his attitude to the land, communicated in the fact that 'he detested everything' and was willing to sell the farm for 'a bloody song', shows the way he sees the land as a burdensome economic asset, which in the context of the whole story, contrasts with the Maori attitudes to land. In many essays, there was relevant discussion of colonialism and its effects, displacing the Maori from their ancestral lands, but in quite a large number this led to a misunderstanding of the context of this particular passage. Such answers often viewed the father's question 'Who are they?' and his reaction to the news of the visitors as racist, but a more careful recall of the story would have revealed that he believes the visitors are those from whom he bought the land and whom he thinks 'might want to buy the place back again'; the fact that the visitors form a family party of Maori is not revealed until later in the

story and surprises the father. It is important that candidates know stories well enough to be able to place the passages precisely.

Question 3

EVELYN WAUGH: *A Handful of Dust*

- (a) There were not many responses to this question and of those who chose it, many concentrated more on Brenda's attitudes to Tony rather than her attitudes to Hetton. The two are naturally linked, but candidates need to be sure that they are answering explicitly the question set. Organised answers recognised that Hetton is indelibly associated with Tony and that its architecture and world are too old-fashioned for Brenda's tastes. Her disaffection with Hetton prefigures her disaffection with Tony. More confident candidates wrote about her frustrations with the antiquated architecture of Hetton, but also that the house is associated with the social world of the village and with the Last family, including gatherings like Christmas, all of which either irritate or bore Brenda, apparent in her reluctance to involve herself. There were few references to Brenda's plans for modernising the house at Hetton itself, particularly her decision, encouraged by Mrs Beaver, to clad the morning room walls in white chromium plating, which Waugh uses as an example of how far apart Brenda's and Tony's views of Hetton are.
- (b) This passage was a much more popular option and many candidates responded to it in careful detail, placing it within the context of the novel as well as looking closely at the effects of Waugh's descriptions and the characters' dialogue. Many compared to Reggie's loquaciousness with the terseness of Tony's replies, resulting in Reggie dominating the exchange despite Tony being the one most affected by the breakup of the marriage. There were comments about Reggie's use of the adjective 'vindictive' to describe Tony, placing him in the wrong despite the initial apparent sympathy. This caused some outrage and recognition of Waugh's demonstration of ways in which London society turns values upside down. Similarly, confident candidates noted Waugh's satirical tone in Reggie's statement 'naturally I'm upset' – what upsets Reggie is not the breakdown of his sister's marriage but having his trip disrupted. They noted how Reggie absolves his sister of blame and devalues the sanctity of marriage, overlooking her affair with Beaver because 'it won't last' and feelings have 'to change' anyway. There was thoughtful comment on the insensitivity of his comparing such change with his own changing archaeological interests. Examiners read some spirited analysis of Waugh's description of Reggie's eating habits, representing society's focus on consumption and greed. Candidates noted the significance of Reggie's 'ruthless manner', indicating his character and approach to Tony, developed in the violent 'champing [of] his food'. There were thoughtful comments on the voracious lack of discrimination in the long list of leftovers, 'that others usually left on their plates', which Reggie works his way through. The strongest responses noted Waugh's characteristic methods of social criticism through humour, but less accomplished answers did not recognise, or were unable to comment on, the comedy of the scene. However, while there were some responses which did not progress far beyond narrative summary and those which showed uncertain knowledge of the rest of the text, most answers engaged with this passage with some understanding.

Question 4

COLSON WHITEHEAD: *The Underground Railroad*

- (a) Cora was often seen to epitomise independence in answers to this question. Less successful responses were narrative based, recounting Cora's journey through the American states with some of the key events, asserting that she is a figure of independence. More successful answers were based on a careful selection of key episodes to show that, although assisted at different times by Caesar and Royal, she remains an independent figure and the only one of those three characters to emerge at the end of the novel into what might be freedom. Confident candidates noted that Whitehead shows that she is motivated by her mother's disappearance, and her early independence is seen in her garden and the destruction of Blake's doghouse. Some commented on how Whitehead uses Ridgeway's pursuit of Cora to focus her role, making those scenes with Ridgeway particularly important. The closing parts of the novel drew particular comment in strong responses, as candidates wrote about her killing of Ridgeway and the significance of her own efforts driving the handcart through the underground railroad tunnels to freedom, without relying on train drivers.

- (b) The question on the passage from 'Ethel' was the most popular prose text option. A significant minority believed that Ethel was another formerly enslaved Black character, suggesting some quite fundamental misunderstanding of her character and role in the novel. However, most candidates recognised her as the reluctant accomplice and wife of Martin, housing Cora as part of the underground railroad in North Carolina. These candidates recognised that Whitehead presents Ethel as a complex character, shaped by her upbringing in a socially conservative white patriarchal society. There was much comment on the fact that 'slavery as a moral issue never interested' her, illustrating the limitations to her, and other Americans', Christian understanding. Candidates noted how this affects her view of the work of the underground railroad and her husband's involvement in it – she is 'livid' when they shelter George and views Cora as 'that termite', a derogatory term which drew a lot of thoughtful comment. Some essays discussed how she is aware and fiercely resentful of the danger which Martin's railroad activities place her in, as she has 'firm ideas about not getting killed for other people's high-minded ideas.' Candidates pointed out how this shows not only her reluctance, but her antagonism towards the underground railroad and the sheltering of Cora. While most candidates recognised the development of Ethel's attitudes in the passage, some took a rather one-dimensional view, seeing a conversion to true Christian compassion for Cora. More confident and perceptive answers explored Whitehead's nuances and ambiguities in the change when she looks after Cora. Such answers noted that she hankers for the transformation experienced by her father and Martin from visiting different girls in the attics of their homes. Some candidates suggested that her father's sexual exploitation and Martin's compassion are in some ways combined in Ethel's visit to Cora in the attic. There was sympathy for the fact that 'everything had been denied Ethel her whole life' but many recognised Whitehead's portrayal of the white saviour syndrome in her dream to travel to Africa as a missionary and her view that 'Africa had come to her' as if Cora is her own gift. Some argued that her superior, reductive view of Africa is also reflected in her perception of Cora as 'curved like a primeval river', and some suggested that the 'filth' washed from her body is not just the residues of Cora's sickness, but Ethel's view of her Blackness. A large number of candidates commented on the 'two kinds of feeling mixed up' in her 'kisses', arguing that Whitehead suggests that compassion is combined with latent lesbianism, emphasised by the placing of the kisses on 'her forehead' and her 'neck'. This complicates the 'selfish purpose' of Ethel's visit to the attic, and many candidates focused on the reductive possessiveness of the final line, 'a savage to call her own'.

Section B: Unseen

Question 5 - Prose

Fewer than a third of candidates tackled this intriguing extract. While some fell into narrative paraphrase, many gained from a careful reading to show how the strange, uncertain figure of Martin Crosbie is presented by the narrator. Those who paid close attention to narrative voice suggested that the uncertainty reveals more about the narrator's character and perspective than it does about Crosbie himself. By examining details of the writing, these essays recognised the development in the speaker's thoughts and feelings about Crosbie, starting with suggestions of a 'ghost' with 'nothing factual about him' before progressing to something more solid – 'he wasn't an illusion... I knew who he was'. His physical description, however, still resents him as insubstantial. There was much in the writing of the first paragraph to which candidates responded, commenting on nebulous words such as 'provisional' and 'figment' as well as more obvious terms such as 'phantasm', 'a trick of the light', 'vanishing' and 'melting away'. Candidates commented that in these ways the writer presents Crosbie as lacking in physical 'substance' and that it seems he might be a product of the narrator's imagination. The second paragraph gives him more physical definition while the references to 'what Kyrre had said about him', often overlooked in responses, gives Crosbie a context and wider reference which give him a stronger sense of reality. Some perceptive candidates commented that the surprise of his physical presence is accentuated by the use of italics in 'I didn't know what he was doing *there*'. They also noted that even his physical description presents him as insubstantial, as the writer uses adjectives like 'tall and thin' while referring to 'pale, sandy hair' and using 'delicate' and 'delicacy' several times. Examiners also read some interesting discussion of the animal comparisons, considering the imagery presenting Crosbie as an animal flushed from cover with nowhere to hide. There were a few comments on the three present participles of 'waiting, or dreading, or hoping', all of which suggest an uncertain future, while some candidates considered the final suggestions of Crosbie as like 'quiet, abstracted sentinels' or 'watchers of the skies who could report, but never interpret, the patterns in the stars.' These phrases, they argued, give Crosbie some kind of mystic significance, but one which the narrator ascribes to him rather than one he feels himself. The passage is densely written, with no dialogue, but repaid careful and involved reading.

Question 6 - Poetry

Far more candidates opted for the poem, though not always successfully. While the four stanzas were universally recognised, many candidates insisted that the iambic rhythm mirrors a heartbeat, overlooking that the poem is not in fact written in iambic rhythm. Very few were aware of anapaestic feet, while the rhyme scheme was frequently misidentified. This was less of a concern, as merely identifying a rhyme scheme has little benefit, but it could have been useful to observe that the rhyming pattern opens and closes each stanza with the same rhyme to create a unit. This is emphasised by each stanza being a single sentence, which few candidates noted. More successful were candidates' observations about repetition, noting that the imperatives 'forgive me' and 'o pardon' open the first and final lines of each stanza, establishing the mood of supplication. Many noted too that the subjects of the stanzas progress through 'eyes', 'hands' and 'mouth' to 'heart', moving from separate body parts to the animating organ and source of love. Some candidates thoughtfully noted that the speaker of the poem abnegates responsibility for the 'sin' by making the various parts of the body the guilty parties, while the word 'sin' itself elevates the wrongdoing to moral and religious levels. They noted, though, that it is the woman who is asked to 'forgive' rather than God, elevating her in turn. Some candidates recognised that these references may be tongue-in-cheek, making the poem a playful expression of testing the boundaries between lovers; most, however, took the poem much more seriously. These noted the progression from stanza 1 to 3 as the references become more physical and sexual, from the religious imagery of the sacred 'shrine', through the sibilance of 'your beautiful flesh to caress', to 'ravished your lips and your breast'. Many wrote strongly expressed interpretations of stanza 3, particularly noting the four verbs 'Assailed ... encircled, oppress'd / And ravished ...' Here, candidates suggested sexual assault and argued that the stanza raises important issues of consent. These were informed personal responses, making connections between an older poem and contemporary issues.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/31 Shakespeare and Drama
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Key messages

- If candidates choose passage-based questions, the extract printed must be the central focus of the answer.
- Candidates must attend carefully to the precise requirements of the question.

General comments

Readers of the report for 9695/31 should bear in mind that this component is taken by only a small number of candidates. For some questions, where there were relatively few responses; the full range of the mark scheme was not covered.

Some weaker candidates showed knowledge of their text but did not apply their knowledge to the particular demands of the question asked. Questions for 9695 Paper 3 often include two stepped elements, 'presentation and dramatic significance' is a good example, and examiners are asked to ensure that both elements form part of the answer. It follows, therefore, that candidates need to have the full requirements of the question in view throughout the time that they are writing. Candidates also need to be wary of attempting to reproduce an essay they may have written whilst preparing for the exam, without tailoring their previous thoughts to the particular question asked on the paper.

A number of candidates, though showing great knowledge of the texts, did not really engage with the fact that the text is a play created to be performed on the stage. To move into the higher levels, there must be an awareness of and explicit reference to the ways in which the text is presented on a stage. It follows therefore that discussions about the stage directions are very important, whereas discussions about punctuation are unnecessary unless anchored to a view about *how* the actor is performing. More could be done by candidates to think about the tone of what they have in front of them. There are some simple questions to consider, particularly in **(b)** questions, about who knows what at precisely this moment in the play; about who is trying to influence who; and about what we as an audience know that the characters do not know in this particular moment.

Some candidates should be reminded that the number of words written is not part of the assessment. Often, extremely long essays are self-penalising, with lots of repetition or plot summary. A candidate will do better to write less but with more focus. Candidates who throw everything they know at a question do not show an ability to be selective, one of the criteria for answers in Level 4 and above. It was noticed that candidates who typed responses were particularly prone to excess. Some would be better advised to spend more time on revising and editing their work.

In order to gain marks for personal response in Level 4 and above, candidates need to show that they can use slightly unusual examples from the text or are arguing a case that is plainly their own, rather than reproducing an opinion 'received' from another. Some candidates are under the impression that these marks are to be gained by relating the action or themes of the play to the modern world or to their own experience. This is not the case.

Many candidates had clearly seen film versions of the texts, and this was often helpful in terms of refining their own opinions because they were able to use this as a demonstration of having considered a variety of possible interpretations of the text. Less good candidates saw the films as simply transparent, the obvious way that the action would be presented. Candidates should be reminded that film is a different medium to stage, unless the film seen is a direct presentation of the whole text performed on stage.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Hamlet*

- (a) Candidates quickly engaged with the implications of this question about madness, a central dramatic driver for the play's action. Most candidates confronted the issue of whether Hamlet is truly mad or not. Contrasts were often made with Ophelia, whose madness is plainly – and consistently – the real thing. Most answers wrote about how these characters had been driven to either fake or real insanity. There were interesting strong responses about Denmark as a country seized with a sort of collective madness. Less good responses often failed to get into the detail, to point out exactly where the moments of fissure lie in the play. A number of candidates argued that Laertes is mad, a slightly unusual view but one that is acceptable in the sense that the word can also mean enraged. Contrasts between him and Hamlet through this lens seemed slightly contrived. Only the best candidates got really close to the text, citing examples of where Hamlet's madness can be explicitly seen as assumed, not real.
- (b) Most candidates were able to see the basic function of the play within a play – that it is used to 'catch the conscience of the king'. A number of candidates produced responses with a limited focus, for example on the exchange between Hamlet and Ophelia, broadening into a discussion about the relationship between the two, or focusing solely on Claudius's guilt. But there was plenty to say about the extract itself. Only a few candidates discussed the second iteration of the play within the play (lines 34–67), where there was much to say about the formality of the language, about the decorum and self-conscious dramatization which Shakespeare is plainly using as a contrast to Hamlet's raw, unmediated emotions. Much more could also have been made about Hamlet's use of the drama to come to terms with his circumstances and psychological state, reflected in his remark 'That's wormwood, wormwood.'

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Taming of the Shrew*

- (a) A question that asks 'to what extent' invites a wide variety of responses. Some candidates saw the women only as victims, pointing to the fact that they are victims both of individual men and of the patriarchy which put women at the behest of men in all aspects of life. There were, therefore, discussions of Katherina's treatment by her father and by Petruchio. Other more subtle answers were able to deal with Bianca too, noting that she is the victim of the romantic love trope, where she is expected to respond positively to conventional (man-made) plots to subvert her father's will. The best answers saw that things are more complex – Bianca is not completely an innocent; Katerina fights back. Many candidates noted that the misogyny of the play, while acceptable in the sixteenth century, is perhaps less acceptable to a modern audience. Very few responses tussled with Katerina's speech at the end of the play (Act 2, Scene 2, lines 146 and following) which remain problematic whatever reading a director takes of this work.
- (b) The extract provided for this question is from the Induction, which contrasts with the main action of the play which is set in Italy. This was not a popular question. But those that tackled it were able to see that this passage deals with a number of the issues raised elsewhere: toxic masculinity; the relationship between men and women (though in this case it is a page disguised as a woman); the power dynamic between men and women; the uncomfortable presentation of the class system; and relationships between servants and masters. Only a small number of candidates felt that one of Shakespeare's methods here is humour – and yet it is here in abundance, with Sly, a tinker by trade, suddenly finding himself a master in command of those around him.

Section B: Drama

Question 3

LYNN NOTTAGE: *Sweat*

- (a) This was the more popular of the questions on the Nottage play. It gave candidates of all abilities the opportunity to work through a series of characters regarding them through the prism of 'chance(s) to improve their lives' or the lack thereof. Jason, Brucie, Tracey and especially Jessie were common subjects, and many candidates were able to use them as examples of how the 'blue collar' characters in the play are denied access to social mobility and financial improvement by the failure of the post-industrial economy they exist in. More successful answers also considered the cases of Cynthia and Oscar, noting that both act in opposition to the trend, because they benefit from opportunities offered: he through graduating to the floor at Olstead's from his menial role at the bar; she through being promoted from that same floor to the 'white collar' management ranks. Some of these answers focused on how this shows that race and ethnicity were not barriers to occupational improvement in the year 2000 time setting of the play. The very best, however, also explored how even those minor victories turned pyrrhic when they lead to Oscar being the subject of anti-Hispanic slurs and physical attack and Cynthia the victim of jealousy and broken friendships.
- (b) There were only a few responses to this question. Most were able to contrast the characters and see that this 'contrapuntal' presentation is typical of the whole. Many focused particularly on the relationship between Cynthia and Brucie here and elsewhere. Better answers sometimes responded to the stage direction in line 31 ('*The women stand in unison, a united front*') to talk about how the women protect each other here, only for Tracey to turn on Cynthia when she gets her promotion by making insidious remarks about her race and bias in equal opportunities hiring. Some candidates talked – rightly – about the atmosphere of the scene or its setting.

Question 4

EUGENE O'NEILL: *Long Day's Journey into Night*

- (a) This question, which addressed one of the more concrete aspects of the play, was very popular. 'Addiction' was a subject which most could readily approach through character, particularly that of Mary, and do so safe in the knowledge that they could address her denial, regret, blame-shifting and nostalgia. Those who achieved higher marks were often able also to explore the male Tyrone's problems with alcohol, its causes and effects. Many noted that Mary's addiction is seen as serious by the other family members, whereas their own alcoholism is simply normal. Some candidates extended the definition of addiction to include James's miserliness, Edmund's fondness for aggravating others and Jamie's fondness for prostitutes. Such responses were not necessarily flawed, providing the material was not stretched too far. The focus on addiction also enabled candidates to engage extensively with stage directions and other para-dramatic features, with the symbolism of the fog and foghorn featuring often. There was often discussion of the role of trickery, both here and elsewhere in the play and of things not being as they seem.
- (b) The extract included extensive stage directions, which weaker candidates ignored them almost completely. Better responses saw that the drama can take place through action (or inaction) as well as through words. Responses at this level were able to comment on Tyrone's resolution never to go to bed before his wife, a sign perhaps that he cares for her more than he admits to his sons. These responses were also able to comment on Mary's appearance and her total absorption with her past. Much was made, too, of Jamie's bitter comment 'The Mad Scene. Enter Ophelia!', which leads to a loss of control by both Tyrone and Edmund, thus exposing some of the repressed emotion that has dominated the play, by telling the truth for once. Some candidates commented on the music and the sudden illumination of the scene. Others noted that this is nearly the end of the play, the beginning of the final descent into darkness for all the characters.

Question 5

WOLE SOYINKA: *Kongi's Harvest*

There were not enough responses on this text to be able to make a general comment on either question.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/32 Shakespeare and Drama
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Key messages

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General comments

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Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Hamlet*

- (a) The most successful responses to this question focused on the difference between outer appearance and inner truth, a central concern of the play. The candidates commented on how public spaces in Elsinore demand performance, political caution and deceit, while private spaces allow Shakespeare to reveal psychological depth, vulnerability and moral struggle. Most candidates commented on the tension between these settings and the way that it creates dramatic irony, heightens suspense, and illustrates the corruption of the Danish court. Weaker candidates struggled to understand that the question was about settings, and focused their responses on character, without understanding that the different settings (outside/inside; private/public) mirror what is happening inside the characters' heads. More could have been done by many candidates to note that the Danish royal family, seen in public, are being watched by the courtiers and are therefore trying to convey an impression – particularly in Claudius and Gertrude's case – of business as usual. At the same time, all the public scenes are undermined by intrusions from their private lives. Hamlet puts it in a semi-whisper: 'a little more than kin, and less than kind' in his first encounter with Claudius and it is clearly dramatized during the play within a play. A small number of weaker candidates did not manage to respond to the question and simply wrote about some of the relationships in the play.
- (b) Most candidates were able to trace the passage and commented on the main characters and the dynamic between Laertes and Hamlet, adding their contextual knowledge of the characters. Successful candidates added commentary on the formal, ceremonial setting and the way that it immediately positions the moment as a highly public one, echoing earlier court scenes where characters must adopt political roles rather than speak with complete honesty. They analysed the atmosphere of public ritual and the way that it contrasts sharply with the private motives of the characters: Claudius plans murder; Hamlet attempts reconciliation; Laertes is torn between honour and revenge. More able candidates noted that this is – finally – the moment where Hamlet is forced into action not reflection. Many candidates commented on the contrast between Laertes as a man motivated by action, as opposed to Hamlet who is motivated by inaction.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Taming of the Shrew*

- (a) There were only a few responses to this question, in part perhaps because the (b) option offered such rewards. The question offered some candidates the opportunity to connect the Induction scenes to the rest of the play, because Sly quickly becomes used to his new role as a master and exploits it to the full. Most responses focused on the main body of the play and on the exchanges of clothes (and therefore identity) between servants and masters, as a driver for both the plot and the comedy of the play. There was much discussion about class stratification at the time.
- (b) Most candidates were confident in analysing the central characters, in particular, Petruchio and the dramatic shifts in his language when he addresses Katherine. The candidates commented on the tone Petruchio adopts towards the servants: deliberately excessive, purposefully theatrical. Most successful candidates discussed the way that his behaviour resembles the 'taming' of a hawk and remarked on the image that he uses. However, not many candidates really worked in detail on the final speech, a soliloquy, where Petruchio is talking directly to the audience ('He that knows better ...') about his motivation. Very few candidates commented on the much gentler tone when he addresses Kate and the effects of this theatricality that Shakespeare so masterfully created in the scene. One or two candidates argued that Katherine needs taming because she is not a very nice person (see her early behaviour in the play) and not because she is a woman who needs to be subservient to male desire.

Section B: Drama

Question 3

LYNN NOTTAGE: *Sweat*

- (a) Answers to this question about ambition focused on a range of characters, their aspirations, their worries, and their frustrations. Better answers often contrasted Cynthia and Chris with the pessimistic self-defeatism of the others. Most candidates dealt with the circumstances of working-class American life, arguing that the lack of personal agency and the oppression of a capitalism that has ceased to function properly led to the various unhappy destinies of the characters. Better responses were able to discuss the way that these elements work themselves out in dramatic terms by referring to particular scenes and moments, and examining dialogue, staging and conflict to bring the issues alive.
- (b) Candidates who responded to this question clearly understood the contrapuntal presentation of the four characters present in this extract. Very few drew attention to the most obvious dramatic device – the change of scene with a concomitant change of tone. Many responses looked closely at the language of the scene as a means of characterising the relationships and giving a sense of realism to the play, both here and elsewhere. A small number of weaker responses simply narrated what happens to the characters in the play as a whole. Better responses saw that Nottage is presenting two mother/son relationships, and remarked on the tensions between Jason and Tracey, whose lives and relationships have failed completely, with Tracey '*strung out*' with drugs during the course of this extract. The best answers were also able to address the play's broader concerns, its portrayal of systematic pressures and its dramatized social commentary.

Question 4

EUGENE O'NEILL: *Long Day's Journey into Night*

- (a) This was a popular question with most candidates successfully handling Mary's central significance to the family's issues. The motifs of the fog, the wedding dress and the nostalgia were very popular in most responses. More successful candidates focused successfully on the dread and fear of Mary's addiction and her body language as well as the significance of her addiction for every member of the family. There was much discussion of her frustrated ambitions. The most successful responses cited specific detail from the play with appropriate analysis of dramatic methods and with analysis of Mary as a psychologically intricate figure. These responses also examined the way that O'Neill uses stage directions, tonal modulation and confessional dialogue to position her as the emotional and thematic centre of the play. Less successful responses tended to present a character study but did not move on to her 'dramatic significance', the second element of the question.
- (b) The more successful responses commented on Cathleen's chatty, playful tone and contrasted that with the family members. Many candidates pointed out Cathleen's role as a choric figure, as an outsider, a representative perhaps of the audience as she points out – '*primly virtuous*' – the dangers of alcohol. Some responses commented on the way the family's alcohol addiction has become so embedded that it's being joked about and excused. Many candidates commented on the way that the normalisation of alcohol is strongly contrasted elsewhere with Mary's addiction to morphine, which draws disapproval from the male characters. Responses commented, too, on the atmosphere of denial shared by all except Cathleen, often pointing to Jamie's refilling of the whiskey bottle with water as typical of the whole family's habitual evasion of reality. The very best answers noted that the question was about addictive behaviour, not just addiction. These answers often dealt with the circling structure of the play, the addiction that all the characters have to repeating the same patterns of behaviour and being unable to break out of the family dynamics which cause them all such pain.

Question 5

WOLE SOYINKA: *Kongi's Harvest*

- (a) Responses frequently offered narrative summaries of Segi's Club rather than an analysis of its dramatic function. Higher-level work saw the club as a symbolic and performative space, one that exposes political decadence, transactional morality and the intersections of power, gender and

class. The best answers analysed Soyinka's manipulation of setting, dialogue and irony to reveal the state's institutional rot and the characters' complicity within it. Lower-level responses lacked thematic synthesis and neglected to demonstrate Soyinka's dramatic methods. The best responses were able to see how the club and its presentation fit in with the overall architecture of the play and its satirical intent.

- (b) High-level responses were able to demonstrate a nuanced grasp of Soyinka's dramaturgy, examining the way that the extract exposes the Aweri as an ineffectual, ritualistic conclave whose intellectual pretensions collapse into hunger-driven pettiness and ideological vacuity. The best work analysed the ironic collisions of tone, the quarrelsome rhythms of dialogue, and the performative absurdity that unmasks their complicity in Kongi's authoritarian spectacle. Weaker responses tended to paraphrase the conversation, note its humour superficially, or identify 'corruption' without exploring dramatic method, political critique or the Aweri's structural insignificance within the wider play.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/33 Shakespeare and Drama
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Key messages

- If candidates choose passage-based questions, the extract printed must be the central focus of the answer.
- Candidates must attend carefully to the precise requirements of the question.

General comments

Some weaker candidates showed knowledge of their text but did not apply their knowledge to the particular demands of the question asked. Questions for 9695 Paper 3 often include two stepped elements, 'presentation and dramatic significance' is a good example, and examiners are asked to ensure that both elements form part of the answer. It follows, therefore, that candidates need to have the full requirements of the question in view throughout the time that they are writing. Candidates also need to be wary of attempting to reproduce an essay they may have written whilst preparing for the exam, without tailoring their previous thoughts to the particular question asked on the paper.

A number of candidates, though showing great knowledge of the texts, did not really engage with the fact that the text is a play created to be performed on the stage. To move into the higher levels, there must be an awareness of and explicit reference to the ways in which the text is presented on a stage. It follows therefore that discussions about the stage directions are very important, whereas discussions about punctuation are unnecessary unless anchored to a view about *how* the actor is performing. More could be done by candidates to think about the tone of what they have in front of them. There are some simple questions to consider, particularly in **(b)** questions, about who knows what at precisely this moment in the play; about who is trying to influence who; and about what we as an audience know that the characters do not know in this particular moment.

Some candidates should be reminded that the number of words written is not part of the assessment. Often, extremely long essays are self-penalising, with lots of repetition or plot summary. A candidate will do better to write less but with more focus. Candidates who throw everything they know at a question do not show an ability to be selective, one of the criteria for answers in Level 4 and above. It was noticed that candidates who typed responses were particularly prone to excess. Some would be better advised to spend more time on revising and editing their work.

In order to gain marks for personal response in Level 4 and above, candidates need to show that they can use slightly unusual examples from the text or are arguing a case that is plainly their own, rather than reproducing an opinion 'received' from another. Some candidates are under the impression that these marks are to be gained by relating the action or themes of the play to the modern world or to their own experience. This is not the case.

Many candidates had clearly seen film versions of the texts, and this was often helpful in terms of refining their own opinions because they were able to use this as a demonstration of having considered a variety of possible interpretations of the text. Less good candidates saw the films as simply transparent, the obvious way that the action would be presented. Candidates should be reminded that film is a different medium to stage, unless the film seen is a direct presentation of the whole text performed on stage.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shakespeare

Question 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Hamlet*

- (a) Most responses showed understanding of why Hamlet chooses to manipulate the players into performing in order to demonstrate Claudius's guilt. The best candidates were able to deal with aspects of meta-theatricality, seeing parallels of situation and noting that this is a situation over which Hamlet has control of both action and language, unlike in his 'real' life. Hamlet, the isolated intellectual, gains control through artifice whilst Claudius, the seemingly powerful king, becomes a passive spectator to his own condemnation. The question led to discussions of Shakespeare's exploration of truth, perception, performance and ideas about illusion and reality. Some responses considered the role of spectators in the play. The best candidates also saw that they allow Hamlet further opportunities for self-exploration, as he confronts the uncertainties about his father's murder and asks the audience to question the nature of morality. Less convincing responses offered a narrative approach rather than tackling the question strategically.
- (b) The question asked candidates to consider Hamlet's state of mind 'here and elsewhere in the play'. Some candidates moved directly to 'elsewhere' without giving due consideration to what is happening in the extract provided. Better responses were able to see the ambiguity of Hamlet's reaction to the ghost ('a spirit of health or goblin damn'd'). These responses were also able to deal with Hamlet's exchanges with Horatio, the only person in the play that he can trust. There was often discussion of the atmosphere of the scene, with the cold of the battlements contrasted to the revelry within the castle and seen as a metaphor for Hamlet's situation. There was much useful discussion of Hamlet's feelings of resentment which makes him eminently suggestible ('what may this mean ...') when the ghost arrives. Many candidates saw the ghost as a liminal figure, an apparition that belongs to mediaeval, Catholic superstition that is being replaced by a more scientific, rational and Protestant world view – hence Hamlet's scepticism and the trepidation of the last lines of the extract. Less profound responses sometimes simply offered a narrative version of events, with little close examination of the language, tone or atmosphere, even if there was sound knowledge of the play as a whole.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *The Taming of the Shrew*

- (a) Too few responses to comment.
- (b) Weaker responses focused exclusively on the passage though all were able to draw contrasts between Bianca and Katherina here. Stronger responses recognised Baptista's obvious favouritism and the underlying hurt behind Katherina's behaviour. They explored the ambiguities in Bianca's seemingly meek, submissive behaviour, arguing very effectively that she was knowingly performing the conventional role expected of her, using it as a mask for her deceitful, strong-willed behaviour elsewhere in the play, foreshadowed by Lucentio's entrance in disguise in the latter part of the extract. Several argued plausibly that the contrasting behaviour of the two sisters here and elsewhere in the play was being used by Shakespeare as a means of challenging contemporary attitudes to women, and some engaged very effectively with detailed exploration of both sisters at the end, evaluating which of their marriages could be interpreted as the happier. Not many responses dealt fully with the latter part of the passage and the obvious issues raised about contemporary attitudes to women. Only a tiny number of candidates were able to comment effectively on the various changes of costume and status which provide much of the comedy of the extract and, indeed, the play as a whole.

Section B: Drama

Question 3

LYNN NOTTAGE: *Sweat*

- (a) Most responses were able to identify Stan's bar as a place of refuge and escape for the workers in the play, but stronger responses engaged more critically both with Stan's claim of its neutrality and its changing role throughout the play. Most were able to chart the growing alienation and hostility between the characters through the three birthday 'celebrations' and most explored the dramatic significance of a place where the workers could vent their feelings in relative safety. Some stronger responses commented on the irony that the bar was as much an example of exploitative capitalism as Olstead's in feeding the workers' addictions. Stan received some perceptive criticism in some responses where his arguably coercive behaviour towards Tracey early in the play was explored. The best responses looked ahead to the play's outcome to evaluate how far the bar could ultimately be seen as a place of potential hope and restoration of workers' cooperation.
- (b) Responses saw that the scene is used to show Nottage's concern about the stifled relationships between parents and children in a repressed socio-economic climate. The difficult communication between Brucie and Chris can also be seen with Jason and Tracey. Brucie, being '*slumped at the table*' was often seen as a metaphor for the slumped condition of the characters after the closing of Olstead's. Some candidates focused on the extract alone. In general, the responses saw Brucie as damaged person who has failed both in his life and with Chris. A few candidates usefully compared this with the relationship of Jason and Tracey, which is dramatized as damaged elsewhere in the play. Many responses noted that there is a reversal of roles, where Chris proves to be more parent-like than Brucie. Candidates who made something of Brucie's final, defeatist, speech (lines 49–55) were usually able to offer the most strategic view of the dramatic arc of the whole scene.

Question 4

EUGENE O'NEILL: *Long Day's Journey into Night*

- (a) The question encouraged candidates to deal with the circling structure of the play, the repetitions, and the constant re-opening of old wounds that is typical of the play. Candidates were able to see how all the characters are trapped into patterns of behaviour and relationships with others that cannot change, and that the characters are simply bound to the destiny of the family dynamic. The ironies of 'forward/night' in the question were noted by some candidates. Many responses focused on one or two characters, with Mary and Tyrone popular. Mary was the more obvious character for detailed commentary and analysis, but it was clear that Tyrone's speeches to Edmund in Act 4 had been read and understood. There were fewer responses on Jamie and Edmund but the better responses worked on each of them as shadows of their respective parent's failures. Some of the best essays were able to place the limited time structure of the play (18 hours or so) against the fluidity of times past. In some essays – usually at the lower end of the mark scheme – there was a lot of only semi-relevant (at best) contextual reference to the O'Neill family and autobiographical issues.
- (b) Candidates noted that this scene is central to the play's action: it reveals (and makes dramatically apparent) Mary's continued dependence on morphine and its effects on both her and the whole family. Weaker answers tended to track through the passage, making critical comments along the way. Better responses had a more strategic view of the passage as a whole and were able to talk about Mary's fragmented speech, her jumpiness, her attempts to maintain normality ('*forcing a laugh*') and the repeated 'unnatural detachment' that characterises her almost dream-like state of euphoria. The best answers were able to make contrasts with the latter part of the scene where the relationship between Tyrone and his wife comes sharply into focus, a mixture of antagonism and attachment displayed by both characters, best characterised by the final stage direction: '*He moves on and she keeps beside him as they disappear in the back parlour.*' Many responses commented on the behaviour of the three men and their attempt to maintain a sense of routine in the face of what is going on with Mary. Some responses also dealt with their hypocrisy: the men are united in their condemnation of Mary for her weaknesses and yet unmoved by her attempts to condemn their addiction to alcohol.

Question 5

WOLE SOYINKA: *Kongi's Harvest*

- (a) There were only a few responses to this question. Candidates were able to see how Kongi's desire to present himself as a new, dynamic force whilst also giving the impression of being traditional in his desire for the yam festival is constantly queried and interrogated by the action of those around him.
- (b) There were only a few responses to this question. Most focused on Danlola and his role in the play as a whole, drawing evidence from the passage as needed.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/41

Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- Arguments are clearest when planned and shaped to specifically address the given question with a clear sense of development from introduction through to conclusion.
- Analysis of effects of form, structure and language should be rooted in the text and supported appropriately.
- Candidates must complete one answer from **Section A** and one answer from **Section B**, ensuring that one text covered is poetry and the other is prose.

General comments

Examiners found clear evidence of thoughtful personal response, the ability to consider and discuss abstract ideas and concepts and detailed analytical engagement presented by many candidates. There are various different approaches taken by candidates when initiating their arguments. Strong openings tended to take a specific view, establishing a clear direction concisely and with the question centrally positioned. The best conclusions feature a sense of summary, evaluation and, in some cases, a personal summation of what has been demonstrated during the course of the answer.

Some candidates wrote quite detailed introductions covering context, lists of concerns and methods with some brief response to the question to suggest the focus they were going to take. This was often helpful in structuring the response. Many of these, however, simply repeated this introduction word for word as a conclusion, or allocated the last half page to summarising their answer when they could have been developing ideas and building analysis a little further, with some brief conclusion of the argument at the end.

Planning answers is a skill that leads to effective use of the exam time, but it is important that plans do not take up more time in construction than the answers themselves.

Examiners continue to see a number of rubric infringements where candidates do not meet the terms of the exam rubric. This paper requires candidates to answer on one poetry text and one prose text, with one coming from **Section A** (pre-1900) and one from **Section B** (post-1900). It is therefore not possible to write an essay on *Pride and Prejudice* and another on *Beloved*, for example, as both are prose texts. In this instance, the examiner will mark both answers, but the rubric infringement means that only the higher of the two marks will be credited. It is important that centres check carefully to ensure that texts studied meet the exam rubric for this specification.

In terms of analysis there was some effective use of technical terminology such as irony, anaphora, parallelism, volta and epiphany and a better understanding than in previous sessions of the effects available using free verse. Many candidates have clearly engaged in learning rhetorical devices – all those terms for different kinds of repetition based on the position of words such as epizeuxis and epistrophe or structural terms such as polysyndeton and asyndeton. The advantage of having these terms as part of an analytical approach is that they relate to aspects of a writer's craft. Importantly, the most beneficial use of these was when the word or effect was attached to specific textual detail and followed up by an analysis of how the device had an impact, for example in terms of tone, emphasis, pace or insight. The least effective approaches to analysis include listing terminology without exemplification or explanation or name-dropping technical features tangentially alongside paraphrase or narrative commentary.

When using the context of a text in answers, it is important that points bear relevance to both the question and the set text. Some excellent and apposite application of contextual detail was noted this series, particularly in relation to *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Conversely examiners reported seeing examples of contextual points that were not closely related to the text or question, for example

tenuous links to film versions of a text or loosely related associations made to texts from other papers on the syllabus.

In terms of **(b)** style questions, candidates seemed more confident dealing with the detail of poetry than prose with candidates demonstrating a sensitive appreciation of the effects of language and other devices. Many candidates appeared to find selecting and using detail from prose more challenging, with some resorting to unsupported commentary at times. Often responses to both poetry and prose **(b)** questions were restricted to the given poems and passages. An ability to refer to some significant detail in the wider text or one or two other poems often helped to anchor the given poem in the context of a poet's concerns or support a discussion of characteristic methods and approaches.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Pre-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 1

JANE AUSTEN: *Pride and Prejudice*

- (a)** This was quite a popular question with answers seen across the ability range. Most responses offered some contextual background with varying detail in knowledge of the socio-economic disadvantages for women in the Regency period. Some attempted, often with limited success, to link this with wider Marxist critical reading. With this established, some candidates limited their focus to Mrs Bennet's determination to marry off her daughters. Others broadened the discussion to include Charlotte Lucas and Mr Collins. Some were able to extend the discussion to include ways in which Elizabeth rebels against the prevailing necessity of marrying into wealth and status. Weaker responses offered often unsupported personal responses that reflected an overly romantic focus, some relying on film versions of the text with little reference to the specifics of the novel. There was some insightful discussion in stronger responses comparing Elizabeth's attitude to wealth to Charlotte's. These argued that Elizabeth turns down Mr Darcy's first proposal despite his wealth, while Charlotte accepts Mr Collins whom she does not particularly like because he offers some degree of wealth and financial security.
- (b)** This question was also quite popular, and examiners reported seeing most answers meeting criteria for levels up to the mid-range. Some candidates struggled to identify the extract within the wider context of the novel. A number of weaker answers appeared to be unsure about the identity of the Gardiners, some confusing them with Mr Collins. In some answers there was a tendency to focus too extensively on Mrs Gardiner's nervousness in expressing her liking for Darcy in case she should offend Elizabeth rather than considering Elizabeth's own feelings. Lack of knowledge in the weakest answers presented a challenge in developing arguments as responses progressed. In some answers there was too much reliance on the narrative of how Darcy intervened to save Lydia and the Bennet family's reputation. There were also some stock, formulaic responses about how Darcy and Elizabeth have overcome their respective pride and prejudice. Better answers were able to focus on Elizabeth's conflicting feelings and provided salient links to the wider novel and its context. The strongest arguments discussed the passage as a turning point in Elizabeth's opinion of Darcy with some references to the form and structure of the text. These answers understood the nature of Austen's use of characterisation and dialogue to create effects.

Question 2

GEOFFREY CHAUCER: *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale*

- (a)** This was by far the most popular question on this section of the paper with most candidates choosing to write about conflict in the prologue and tale. Some found it difficult to identify the nature of conflict and built circuitous and not fully relevant arguments discussing Januarie's attitude to marriage. Most demonstrated at least straightforward knowledge of the tale but could only process it through narrative retelling or simple formulaic assertions of conflict such as age and youth or fate and free will. Analysis tended to focus on simple comparisons of Januarie's garden with the Garden of Eden. While not technically inaccurate, the assertive nature of the analysis missed opportunities for personal engagement or exploration of the irony that is central to the tale's execution, for example Damyan and May having sex in a tree. Better responses discussed the conflict between Januarie's expectation and the reality of his marriage. One promising answer touched on the

conflict between ideas of courtly love and the fabliau, particularly seen in Damyan's lovesickness, the letter he writes declaring his love and May throwing it into the privy. Some candidates discussed the conflict of views between Justinus and Placebo and the conflict between Proserpine and Pluto. More effective answers often considered the correlation between Januarie's physical and metaphorical blindness, the best of these relating it to wider arguments about the Merchant's own agenda and situation.

- (b) This question was much less popular than the (a) option on this text. The few that attempted a response to the passage struggled to explore it in depth, quickly moving from some hasty references to Januarie's expectations in marriage to a wider commentary on his blindness and May's adultery. Better answers understood that Januarie had accepted Placebo's advice because it was what he wanted to hear. They discussed Januarie's attitude to marriage - shopping for a bride - his figurative blindness and the emphasis he puts on youth and physical features. Some included interesting personal arguments about his lecherous attitude. Few mentioned the lack of input from May and what she thought or her lack of verbal space. The consideration of May's betrayal suffered from the same problems related to understanding of irony that were seen in answers to 2a, where May's sexual acts with Damyan were automatically registered as ironic without further exploration or explanation. There was some evidence of an animated version of the text watched by some candidates which seemed to feature Januarie, Placebo and Justinus sitting in a bathhouse.

Question 3

JOHN DONNE: Selected Poems

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment effectively on performance.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment effectively on performance.

Question 4

GEORGE ELIOT: *Middlemarch*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment effectively on performance.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment effectively on performance.

Question 5

THOMAS HARDY: *Far from the Madding Crowd*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment effectively on performance.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment effectively on performance.

Question 6

WALT WHITMAN: Selected Poems from *Leaves of Grass*

- (a) There were several answers to this question. Some interpretations that viewed Whitman's relationships in exclusively homosexual terms were mainly assertive in nature. Some offered a more general view of Whitman as endorsing human contact in hostile war-torn or urban conditions. Some better answers illustrated this with some useful references to poems such as *O Captain! My Captain!* and *The Wound-Dresser*. The best answers incorporated the need for companionship and solidarity and the relationship between that and the need for peace and solitude in nature, as in *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*.
- (b) This question was a little more popular than the (a) option on this text. In terms of context, some answers focused too much on the poem as a definite indication of Whitman's homosexuality without fully supporting the argument. Some answers offered an attempt to connect the given poem to others from the selection that suggest companionship such as *I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing*. Better answers looked at ways in which Whitman is setting himself up as both apart from the herd and yet needing close companionship. Although Whitman was reasonably well handled by

candidates, responses still often lacked development or secure knowledge and awareness of specific context. Some comparisons between poems, although acceptable, often seemed forced – as in this question the attempts to make connections between the poem in the passage and some implicit and often tenuous endorsements of human companionship in *I Sing the Body Electric* or *Beat! Beat! Drums!* Some candidates appeared to use a restricted body of poems which they applied to the question with little discrimination or awareness of the question focus.

Section B: Post 1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 7

LOUISE GLÜCK: Selected Poems from *The Wild Iris*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment effectively on performance.
- (b) This question was quite popular and examiners saw a range of approaches. There was sometimes confusion about whose voice is narrating the poem. Some thought it was a plant, some a person and only a few candidates recognised it as God's voice. Those who did, achieved at least a straightforward discussion of the poem with some sound arguments. Some candidates began to explore the significance of how this poem implies humanity's lack of imagination or sense of wonder as a source of God's exasperation. Some also explored the evidence for God's sorrow in the poem as well as the divine contempt and disregard for humanity. There was very little evidence of reference to the wider collection which restricted candidates' achievement.

Question 8

JAMES JOYCE: *Dubliners*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment effectively on performance.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment effectively on performance.

Question 9

TONI MORRISON: *Beloved*

- (a) There were a number of responses to this question with most falling in the low to mid range of marks. Some answers seemed to be confused about the characters of Baby Suggs, Beloved and Denver. Basic knowledge of the text was not always secure throughout many less successful responses. For example, some maintained that Baby Suggs is still alive and well at the end of the novel and helps Denver banish Beloved. Another answer suggested that Baby Suggs is the baby killed by Sethe. Some answers began reasonably with a grasp of the circumstances of Baby Suggs' freedom and her assistance of Sethe, but lost cohesion and became attempted plot summaries. Better answers had some understanding of Baby Suggs as a representative of the past and some considered her significance as leader of the community and a source of healing. The best of these featured relevant support and aspects of contextual detail. Call and response symbolism and point of view were considered as significant in defining her role. One stronger answer noted that her example inspires Denver to enlist the help of the community in banishing Beloved. Some essays seemed to be fragmented, lacking in a structured or systematic approach to the question with some reading like a brainstormed list of partial ideas and quickly shifting views.
- (b) This question was less popular than the (a) option on this text. Responses were often in the low to mid range of marks. Some did not deal with Sethe and Denver and instead paraphrased Paul D.'s section. Most answers struggled to explain the significance of Paul D.'s section and offered vague suggestions that times were hard for black people after the Civil War. Those responses incorporating Sethe and Denver did better and were able to address the significance of Beloved's sudden appearance. Better responses explored Beloved's element of mystery and ways in which Morrison creates uncertainty. The closer responses stayed to the text the better, but it seemed that candidates were wary of textual engagement and too easily strayed into generalisations of plot and repeated stock definitions of trauma.

Question 10

GABRIEL OKARA: Selected Poems from *Collected Poems*

- (a) There were insufficient responses to this question to comment effectively on performance.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment effectively on performance.

Question 11

JEAN RHYS: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment effectively on performance.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment effectively on performance.

Question 12

NATASHA THRETHEWEY: *Native Guard*

- (a) There were insufficient responses to this question to effectively comment on performance.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment effectively on performance.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/42

Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Key messages

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When using the context of a text in answers, it is important that points bear relevance to both the question and the set text. Some excellent and apposite application of contextual detail was noted this series, particularly in relation to *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Conversely examiners reported seeing examples of contextual points that were not closely related to the text or question, for example

tenuous links to film versions of a text or loosely related associations made to texts from other papers on the syllabus.

In terms of **(b)** style questions, candidates seemed more confident dealing with the detail of poetry than prose with candidates demonstrating a sensitive appreciation of the effects of language and other devices. Many candidates appeared to find selecting and using detail from prose more challenging, with some resorting to unsupported commentary at times. Often responses to both poetry and prose **(b)** questions were restricted to the given poems and passages. An ability to refer to some significant detail in the wider text or one or two other poems often helped to anchor the given poem in the context of a poet's concerns or support a discussion of characteristic methods and approaches.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Pre-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 1

JANE AUSTEN: *Pride and Prejudice*

- (a)** This was a very popular question with answers seen at all levels of achievement. Most candidates showed at least some sound knowledge of the novel's plot and were able to write clearly on the shortcomings of Mr and Mrs Bennet, with some comparing them unfavourably to the Gardiners. Responses typically discussed Mrs Bennet's obsession with marrying off her daughters because of entailment, her excitement over Bingley, and her anger at Elizabeth's refusal of Mr Collins. Mrs Bennet was often criticised for prioritising marriage over her children's happiness, while Mr Bennet was condemned as an emotionally distant and ineffective father who failed to control Lydia, with his decision to let her go to Brighton seen as a key cause of her elopement. Stronger answers used specific textual detail and explored the wider significance of parents in shaping character, protecting social standing and ensuring financial security. Some made effective comparisons between Mrs Bennet and Lady Catherine de Bourgh, particularly in their manipulative behaviour regarding marriage, and contrasted Mrs Bennet's delight at Lydia's marriage with Mr Bennet's rueful self-blame. Better responses also examined Mr Bennet's humour, his support of Elizabeth's refusal of Collins, and the gradual development of his character. Weaker answers tended to be descriptive and loosely structured. Some relied too heavily on the opening line of the novel, 'It is a truth universally acknowledged...', not always relating it to the question. There was some evidence of contextual inaccuracies or irrelevant references to other texts. Stronger candidates recognised the complexities of the Bennets, some showing sympathy for Mrs Bennet's desperation within Regency social constraints. High-level responses compared different parental models, particularly the Gardiners as surrogate parents, and demonstrated analysis of narrative methods such as free indirect discourse, humour, letters, and character foils.
- (b)** This question was most popular on *Pride and Prejudice*. Many responses were weakened by long, unfocused introductions about the Bingley and Darcy families or their estates with some using excessive quotation and paraphrase rather than analysis. Less successful candidates often showed limited attention to narrative methods, referring to the wider text mainly in terms of plot. Some answers strayed from the question by focusing too heavily on Darcy and Elizabeth without linking this back to the Bingleys. Most candidates recognised Miss Bingley's motivations to be rooted in status and wealth, though many missed the comic presentation of her desperation to attract Darcy. Stronger responses explored the humour and effects of free indirect discourse, particularly in presenting Miss Bingley's exasperation (for example, 'She could not win him') and its juxtaposition with Elizabeth's quiet observation. However, many essays were unbalanced, concentrating far more on Miss Bingley than on her brother. Straightforward answers identified contrasts between the siblings, often noting Mr Bingley's good nature, sociability, and genuine affection for Jane, as well as his tendency to be influenced by Darcy. Some linked this to later events in the novel. More reflective responses moved beyond simple condemnation of Miss Bingley, instead considering how she makes the best of her limited situation. More successful answers analysed Miss Bingley as both humorous and desperate, while also contextualising her behaviour as a social necessity for women of her class, especially those without parental support. Better candidates explored Austen's wit and irony, sometimes framing the episode as part of a wider social critique of marriage in the Regency period. The strongest responses offered perceptive comparisons, such as between Miss Bingley and Charlotte Lucas, evaluating marriage as

transactional, and showed critical engagement with Mr Bingley's politeness, malleability, and contrasting moments of sarcasm.

Question 2

GEOFFREY CHAUCER: *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale*

- (a) This was quite a popular question that required candidates to consider how Chaucer presents attitudes to marriage in the text. Most candidates focused on Januarie, particularly his list of requirements for a wife, with some consideration of May's motivations and limited choices as a low-status medieval woman. Frequently used points included the transactional nature of marriage, Januarie's hypocrisy and the role of Damyan as well as the influence of the Merchant's own marital experience and views thereof. Some candidates confused the narrative voice, incorrectly attributing views to Januarie rather than the Merchant. Many candidates were able to reference Justinus and Placebo, and Pluto and Proserpina, but fewer translated this knowledge into effective analysis, relying instead on narrative summary and therefore remaining at mid-level responses. More developed answers examined a range of characters and perspectives on marriage, with stronger ones exploring the Merchant himself and how his brief but unhappy marriage shapes the bitter tone of the tale. Some thoughtful responses showed effective personal responses in their sympathy for May's position. Good answers demonstrated detailed language analysis and a clear focus on presentation rather than plot. The strongest responses foregrounded the Merchant's Prologue, identifying its misogynistic and pessimistic view of marriage and linking this directly to the narrative that follows. High-achieving candidates demonstrated impressive recall and analysis, using contrasts and foils such as Placebo and Justinus, Januarie and May, and the satirical function of classical and religious authorities. A few applied apt critical theories to enrich their interpretations. Successful essays focused on how marriage is presented, considering both contemporary and modern responses. They explored attitudes towards May's adultery as either understandable or as reinforcing misogynistic or patriarchal views, often evaluating both interpretations. Fewer candidates engaged fully with Pluto and Proserpina, though some noted the ambiguity of the ending. Less assured answers tended to generalise about medieval marriage or symbolism, while some impressive ones situated the tale insightfully within the wider context of *The Canterbury Tales*.
- (b) This was less popular than the (a) question but attracted a number of answers. Although responses covered the full ability range, most candidates were more confident discussing themes than analysing methods. Many began with the passage but drifted into a general discussion of marriage, sometimes switching into the alternative question. More assured answers engaged closely with the extract, commenting on the dramatic use of dialogue and the comic energy of May's bold rebuttals of Januarie's accusations. Some analysed Januarie's exaggerated lamentation, commenting on hyperbolic imagery and linking it to the Merchant's cynical, lamenting tone in the Prologue. Others explored contrasts in language, such as the narrator's coy reluctance to speak 'uncurteisly' set against Januarie's blunt repetition of 'struggle' and the crude declarative 'He swyved thee.' Less secure responses were more general, often pairing quotations poorly with the points being made. Most candidates could explain the role of Pluto and Proserpine and Januarie's metaphorical blindness. Some mentioned fabliau elements, physical farce, and symbolic settings such as the pear tree, though often without fully appreciating the comedy. Weaker answers relied on narrative overview with limited textual understanding. Many missed opportunities to track Januarie's reaction to regaining his sight or to analyse the ending in detail. Contextual discussion and critical viewpoints were rare, with limited reference to gender, marriage, class, religion, or patriarchy. Higher-level responses explored elements of irony, gender politics, and hypocrisy. The strongest essays analysed dramatic and situational irony, fabliau conventions, Edenic parody, shifting power from Januarie to May, and recurring metaphors of blindness and wax. Some offered a personal response that was sympathetic to May, arguing that she cleverly navigates an imposed marriage and outwits the men in the tale.

Question 3

JOHN DONNE: Selected Poems

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment effectively on performance.
- (b) This question was quite popular with candidates of varying abilities writing on *Twickenham Garden*. Some responses demonstrated wider knowledge in their introductions but then focused almost

entirely on the given poem. Most answers were at least sound with several perceptive responses showing clear knowledge and understanding, including consideration of Donne's purpose and audience. Candidates explored biblical imagery, particularly the serpent as a symbol of treacherous and poisonous love. Strong analysis was offered on the idea of 'spider love,' supported by contextual awareness of the garden in Renaissance literature, and some responses showed confident handling of the mandrake image and the poem's final paradoxical couplet. The strongest responses traced the poem closely, offering detailed language analysis linked to betrayal and deceit. These included sustained discussion of 'spider love' and the extended metaphor of tears, connecting their supposed purity to the speaker's claims of genuine love. Promising answers engaged with similar ideas but lacked wider reading, context, or critical perspectives. Less successful approaches took a running commentary approach, aiming primarily to explain meaning. Some successfully unpacked the argument of the central stanzas but struggled with the irony of the closing lines. More assured responses tracked the development of key images, particularly tears, appreciating sound effects, hyperbolic opening imagery, and the concrete image of the stone fountain. The poem offered opportunities for comparison and some candidates made productive links to Donne's scepticism in other works. The least effective answers relied on feature-spotting or technical terminology without developing a coherent interpretation, limiting their engagement with the poem's central concerns.

Question 4

GEORGE ELIOT: *Middlemarch*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment effectively on performance.
- (b) There were few answers to this question. Candidates commented on the winter setting and noted phrases such as 'imitations of books' and 'ghostly stag.' Some linked Eliot's description of the landscape to Dorothea and Casaubon's relationship, arguing it is not real and half-dead. One candidate observed that it is Casaubon's choice to speak with Tucker rather than attend to Dorothea and picked up the word 'pregnant.' Responses struggled to connect observations to the wider novel and its concerns.

Question 5

THOMAS HARDY: *Far from the Madding Crowd*

- (a) This was quite a popular question with responses seen at all levels of achievement. The strongest responses analysed the varied functions of chance and coincidence in the novel, particularly at the beginning, showing how unexpected events reveal character through differing reactions to forces beyond individual control, shape or threaten relationships, and generate tension that drives the plot. This approach allowed candidates to engage with Hardy's concerns without excessive narrative summary. Many recognised that disasters such as Gabriel Oak's loss of his sheep, and his responses to the fire and storm, demonstrate his resilience, moral integrity, and steady development of his relationship with Bathsheba. Although candidates frequently identified key coincidences such as Fanny Robin going to the wrong church, Troy's chance meeting with Bathsheba, Fanny's death, and Troy's reappearance on the day Bathsheba is about to accept Boldwood, many lacked sufficient textual detail to explore their wider effects beyond advancing the plot towards the eventual marriage of Oak and Bathsheba. Weaker responses relied heavily on paraphrase or retelling, focusing on what happens rather than why Hardy employs such plot devices or how they function structurally and thematically. Engagement with critics was limited and analysis often gave way to explanation. A common weakness was an overemphasis on Bathsheba's relationships with the male characters without consistently linking these to chance and coincidence. More successful essays used the interplay between Gabriel, Troy, and Boldwood as an organising framework, for example analysing Bathsheba's Valentine as a chance action that becomes a tragic catalyst for Boldwood. Gabriel was often discussed in terms of coincidental reversals of fortune that place him under Bathsheba's authority, enabling him to protect her. Stronger responses also explored the melodramatic nature of events, including Troy's apparent death and return, and Boldwood's final act of violence. The best answers connected these moments to Hardy's concept of the Immanent Will, interpreting chance as an impersonal force shaping human lives.
- (b) This question was also quite popular. Most candidates recognised Gabriel Oak's chastisement of Bathsheba and noted that, despite their reversed social positions, Gabriel ultimately displays

'placid dignity' and quiet authority in the chapter. Stronger responses explored the dialogue in detail, showing awareness of the pair's shared history and the shifting power dynamics between them. These answers engaged with Bathsheba's changeable temperament while linking Gabriel's measured response to the symbolic significance of his name. More able candidates unpacked the biblical imagery, including the simile of Moses and Pharaoh, and connected this to Gabriel's moral authority. Effective responses analysed the sparring quality of the dialogue, highlighting the contrast between Gabriel's phlegmatic calm and Bathsheba's irritation at his detached criticism. Many candidates showed wider textual knowledge by referring to the Valentine prank on Boldwood, Oak's early awareness of her vanity, and her swift dismissal and recall of him after the sheep crisis. The strongest answers closely analysed specific phrases from the passage, contrasting Oak's consistent, cool judgement with Bathsheba's anger, pride in her role as employer, and her use of his past declaration of love as a weapon. Some insightfully deconstructed phrases were used such as 'thoughtful, meek and comely woman' to show why this clashes with Bathsheba's character. Less assured responses tended to simplify Oak as merely honest and serious, missing opportunities to reference their effective cooperation elsewhere in the novel, such as during the storm. Some portrayed Hardy as presenting Bathsheba entirely negatively, arguing that her eventual marriage proves a woman cannot manage independently. Stronger essays avoided this reductive view, recognising Hardy's more nuanced presentation of authority, gender and mutual respect.

Question 6

WALT WHITMAN: Selected Poems from *Leaves of Grass*

- (a) There were very few responses to this question. Most responses offered brief, descriptive accounts of poems, including *As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life*, relying on the given extract from the (b) question, with little analysis of how setting creates meaning. Stronger answers explored realistic settings in *The Wound-Dresser* and natural imagery in *I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing*. Many missed opportunities to analyse America as a setting, relying on thematic summary rather than effects.
- (b) This was a very popular question with candidates of all abilities. Responses working at lower levels tended to focus narrowly on nature, often treating the poem as a straightforward monologue by Whitman and applying a 'transcendentalist' or biographical lens without sustained analysis. Context was frequently quoted as opinion rather than used to illuminate the poem, leading to misconceptions about meaning. Some candidates misunderstood key ideas, offering inaccurate paraphrase, literal readings such as a shipwreck narrative, or speculative interpretations of references to 'father' and 'Paumanok.' Wider reading was often absent, and isolated quotations were used without grasp of the poem as a whole. More successful responses explored the poem as an expression of existential crisis, analysing how Whitman represents himself through the debris encountered on his walk. These answers examined the symbolic relationship between the speaker and the 'father' and 'mother,' interpreting them as aspects of nature or existence rather than biographical figures. Candidates showed clearer understanding of Paumanok and how the setting frames the speaker's sense of loss and uncertainty. The strongest essays situated the extract within the wider poem, recognising it as a moment of profound self-doubt in which the poet fears he has failed to understand either himself or the world. Some made brief but effective comparisons with *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*, contrasting childhood harmony with nature and the adult speaker's desperate search for meaning. The most successful responses analysed imagery of the ocean and washed-up debris as symbols of fragmentation and mystery and discussed Whitman's self-presentation as needy and insignificant. These answers also engaged with form and language, commenting on free verse, anaphora, cataloguing and shifting tones that mirror the ocean's movement. A few explored linguistic ambiguity, such as the unspecified demand for answers and the unclear identity of the addressed 'You', recognising how uncertainty itself is central to the poem's meaning.

Section B: Post 1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 7

LOUISE GLÜCK: Selected Poems from *The Wild Iris*

- (a) Several answers were seen. Some focused helpfully on the use of different voices: the human speaker lamenting an 'unreachable father' and the difficulty of loving a silent, unknowable god,

contrasted with the resentful or distant creator figure expressed through natural phenomena. Stronger answers used this as a clear organising principle. One successful response traced the persona's journey of faith across three *Vespers* poems, charting its gradual erosion. Another high-level essay compared tone and voice across *Vespers*.

More basic responses were largely narrative, often listing poems such as *Matins*, *End of Winter*, and *The Wild Iris* without sustained analysis or clarity of reference. Some answers showed promise in their openings but lacked supporting evidence and analytical development. This suggested limited textual familiarity and highlighted that, in such cases, candidates might perform better on a single-poem question where close analysis can be sustained.

- (b) This question on the poem, *Witchgrass* proved highly popular and was accessible to most candidates. A wide range of responses was seen across all levels. Most candidates engaged confidently with the witchgrass's argument, tracking how the poet constructs its assertive, accusatory tone. Strong answers commented effectively on form, noting how free verse, enjambment, caesura and asides mimic natural speech to control emphasis and rhythm. Candidates often explored the impact of the isolated opening word 'Something,' the repeated use of 'disorder,' and the contrast with the firm, declarative sentences of the final stanza, which assert the autonomy and resilience of nature. Some perceptive responses interpreted the poem's language of 'slur,' name-calling and blame as a metaphor for broader political or social attitudes, including resistance to change and the impulse to assign fault rather than accept loss or transformation. A few candidates questioned the implications of the final line, expressing unease at the witchgrass's absolute confidence in its own survival at the expense of all else. The most successful essays made connections to the wider collection. Several linked the poem to others voiced by plants that are unafraid of death and confident in rebirth. One particularly strong response connected the 'little paradigm of failure' to a *Vespers* poem in which the poet's gardener-persona expresses frustration at her lack of control over natural processes and the apparent indifference of the creator figure. Less confident responses remained narrowly focused on the given poem and relied heavily on paraphrase. At the lower levels, candidates typically offered thematic readings, identifying the witchgrass as a symbol of life's challenges. Some extended this to historical or social contexts, including Native American resilience or the experience of marginalised groups, while a smaller number adopted a spiritual interpretation centred on endurance, faith and renewal.

Question 8

JAMES JOYCE: *Dubliners*

- (a) There were very few answers to this question on the presentation of women in *Dubliners*. A few responses looked at *Eveline* and *Clay*, exploring the position of women as a reflection of the wider backdrop and paralysis of the setting. Some very good references were made to the role of Eveline's mother and her death as representing the future awaiting those who do not manage to break free. Answers were also seen based on *The Boarding House* and *The Dead*. These were informed by some general contextual material on the patriarchy and Dublin society being responsible for women's paralysis.
- (b) This question was popular and generally handled well by candidates working at a range of levels. More successful responses traced Little Chandler's self-delusion and showed how it intensified following his meeting with Ignatius Gallaher, correctly identifying the narrative movement towards a crushing anti-climax. Stronger candidates demonstrated secure knowledge of both the extract and the wider text, making effective links to other stories such as *The Dead*, *An Encounter* and, most commonly, *Eveline*. The strongest answers analysed Joyce's presentation of Little Chandler in detail, including discussion of his name and its implications, his desire to emulate Ignatius (with its connotations of fire and energy), and his role as a flâneur, walking and imagining a more fulfilled life. The most confident responses clearly addressed the extract in the introduction, defined Joyce's concept of 'paralysis' as political, religious and social stagnation, and situated the passage within the wider literary context of *Dubliners*. These essays offered thoughtful analysis of character through close interpretation of quotations and the juxtaposition of Chandler and Gallaher. However, some fell short of the highest level due to limited development of wider-text references. Most candidates explored the use of free indirect discourse in the opening paragraph to convey Chandler's admiration for Gallaher's 'wild', unconventional energy, and engaged with Joyce's recurring idea that success requires escape from Dublin. Stronger responses examined Joyce's language closely, particularly the metaphor of Chandler's poetic impulse taking 'life within him like

an infant hope'. The best answers developed this by linking to the story's ending, recognising the irony that Chandler's sense of lifelong imprisonment is triggered by his crying child, and noting the self-deception in his imagined literary success and uncertainty about what he truly wants to express.

Question 9

TONI MORRISON: *Beloved*

- (a) This was a popular question with a range of responses seen. Most answers explored freedom as a complex and subjective concept, differing widely across characters. Many focused on the dual role of Beloved, whose presence offers emotional comfort while also trapping Sethe, and paradoxically enables Denver's eventual engagement with the wider community. Candidates frequently considered the cost of freedom, using examples such as Baby Suggs' spiritual exhaustion, Halle's psychological collapse, and Sixo's defiant sense of freedom in death through the knowledge that the Thirty-Mile Woman is pregnant. Moderately successful responses typically showed a clear understanding that physical emancipation does not guarantee true freedom. Stronger answers argued that Sethe never fully attains freedom, as she remains psychologically imprisoned by trauma, guilt and 're-memory,' a condition reinforced by Beloved's return. Baby Suggs was often discussed as a character who experiences freedom briefly through communal worship in the Clearing and ultimately in death. Other successful answers examined freedom as subjective, for example through Paul D's struggle for emotional release and Sixo's refusal to submit spiritually despite extreme suffering. The most successful responses also analysed Morrison's use of irony and postmodern narrative techniques, particularly the paradox that although the novel is set after the 13th Amendment, the characters remain mentally and emotionally enslaved. Some sensitive responses explored Denver's development into a character with agency, highlighting her movement beyond the house and her role in seeking help for her mother. Strong introductions that framed different dimensions of freedom helped candidates structure their arguments effectively. The best essays demonstrated secure textual knowledge, comparing physical freedom with the haunting persistence of memory. They examined Sethe's determination to protect her children, the recurring trauma of infanticide, and symbols such as the Ohio River, before concluding with moments of tentative hope, including communal healing and Sethe's recognition that she herself is her own 'best thing.'
- (b) This was a very popular question. Responses showed varying levels of engagement with the presentation of Sethe in the passage. Stronger candidates recognised that while the revisiting of her past is characteristic, the extract is uncharacteristic in affording Sethe an unfiltered first-person voice through stream of consciousness. These answers analysed Morrison's use of fragmented syntax, repetition and fluid movement between past and present to reflect Sethe's psychological state. Perceptive responses also traced the shift in possessive language from 'She mine' to 'You mine,' exploring how Beloved's presence reshapes Sethe's identity and sense of self. Sethe's renewed sensory engagement with colour and gardening was often interpreted as an awakening to ordinary life and a positive vision of motherhood, suggesting a temporary release from guilt and trauma. Moderately successful responses focused primarily on themes of motherhood and protection. These typically explored Sethe's relationship with her own mother, the dehumanisation she suffers under schoolteacher - particularly the reduction of her identity to animal and human characteristics - and her rationale for infanticide. Beloved's ambiguous identity was often noted but not always explored in depth. Less successful answers tended to rely more on a narrative focus, showing awareness of stream of consciousness without analysing how Morrison structures and modulates the language across the extract. Some responses concentrated almost exclusively on the infanticide, drawing on wider references such as the symbolism of Sethe's milk and her bond with Beloved. While these candidates demonstrated understanding of Sethe's psychological trauma and fierce protectiveness, some overstated moments of 'happiness' and failed to recognise shifts in tone and structure. Colour imagery was frequently overlooked. The strongest essays explored the paradox of Sethe's justification, 'If I had not killed her she would have died', linking it convincingly to the brutal realities of slavery, alongside sensitive analysis of the symbolic significance of milk and motherhood.

Question 10

GABRIEL OKARA: Selected Poems from *Collected Poems*

- (a) There were insufficient responses to this question to comment effectively on performance.

- (b) This was a very popular question with answers seen across the ability range. Many responses reflected moderate ability and commonly advanced the view that the drum symbolises cultural tradition while the piano represents modernity. Candidates frequently grounded this reading in a Nigerian context, arguing that the tension between the two instruments reflects the negotiation between indigenous heritage and Western influence. Many engaged productively with language choices such as 'complex' and 'crescendo,' interpreting them as metaphors for the layered, evolving nature of contemporary Nigerian identity in which progress and tradition coexist, sometimes uneasily. Stronger answers moved beyond thematic discussion to consider form and structure. These responses noted the use of free verse as a rejection of rigid Western poetic conventions and identified a volta marking a shift in tone or perspective. Analysis showed how this structural change reinforces the poem's movement from cultural rootedness towards modern transformation. A small number of confident responses demonstrated more sophisticated critical engagement through close analysis of imagery and juxtaposition. Examples included the contrast between 'jungle' and 'telegraphing' to capture the collision of natural landscapes with technological advancement, and the use of images such as 'labyrinth' and 'lost in the morning mist' to suggest disorientation and uncertainty. These candidates recognised that modernisation is presented as complex and ambiguous rather than straightforwardly progressive. Less successful responses tended to work chronologically through the poem, relying heavily on quotation and paraphrase. While most identified the symbolic opposition between piano and drums, weaker answers repeated this contrast without developing alternative interpretations or making connections to the wider collection. Some appeared to treat the poem as an unseen text. Some of the best answers successfully linked the poem to others such as *You Laughed and Laughed and Laughed*, or briefly referenced historical context, although in one case contextual discussion overshadowed textual analysis. The strongest responses explored the interaction between piano and drums in depth, analysing phrases such as 'lost in the labyrinth of its complexities' and 'dagger point,' and recognising that the final stanza suggests unresolved internal and cultural conflict rather than a clear resolution.

Question 11

JEAN RHYS: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

- (a) This was quite a popular question. A number of responses were excessively general in approach, showing limited textual knowledge and confusion about Antoinette's family as white Creoles. Some incorrectly believed they had been enslaved themselves. Most candidates were, however, able to comment on the poverty of estate owners after emancipation, hostility from formerly enslaved people, and significant events such as Antoinette's experience of name-calling, her relationship with Tia, Annette's marriage to Mr Mason, and the fire at Coulibri. These points were often followed by narrative summary rather than analysis. More confident candidates drew on ideas of patriarchy and colonialism, exploring Antoinette's husband's attitudes, particularly his renaming of her and anxiety about racial purity. A couple of responses addressed his treatment of the servants, including Christophine and his sexual exploitation of Amélie. Many candidates struggled with the novel's representation of slavery, leading to unfocused discussion or loss of direction after initial references to phrases such as 'white cockroach' or Rochester as a coloniser. Weaker responses showed little understanding of context or of how Rhys shapes meaning through narrative technique. Stronger responses demonstrated a more nuanced understanding of the legacy of slavery. They explored not only the experiences of enslaved people but also their perceptions of former owners after emancipation. These candidates recognised Annette and Antoinette as liminal figures, viewed as complicit in slavery yet rejected by both black and white communities. Christophine's authority and independence were effectively analysed as a reversal of colonial power. Some also considered the marginalisation of mixed-race characters such as Daniel Cosway and the rigid racial hierarchies within Creole society. The best responses linked Antoinette's renaming and eventual fate to symbolic forms of enslavement, interrogated colonial discourse through Mr Mason's role, and handled racial oppositions with sensitivity and precise terminology.
- (b) This was a very popular question with responses varying widely in quality. Weaker candidates were often unsure of the narrative voice in the extract and relied heavily on narrative summary. Some briefly noted Rochester as an outsider but then moved quickly into often inaccurate accounts of later events, including errors in chronology and context, particularly in relation to Bertha. More secure responses identified Rochester as the narrator and explored his reactions to the Caribbean environment. These candidates analysed his sense of unease and claustrophobia, often contrasting it with Antoinette's comfort and familiarity within the landscape. Antoinette's mockery of

England was effectively discussed, with stronger answers recognising how this anticipates her later displacement and loss of freedom when she leaves the colour and vitality of Granbois for England. Some candidates also commented on Rochester's use of terms such as 'negroes,' linking this language to his underlying racism and colonial attitudes. Stronger essays made effective use of language analysis, focusing on colour imagery, natural description and Rochester's inner dialogue to convey his malaise, alienation and foreboding. Several noted how his feeling of being 'closed in on' as he approaches Granbois foreshadows both his marriage and his psychological entrapment. The contrast between Rochester's oppressive perceptions and Antoinette's ease, her delight in the 'shabby white house' and warmth towards the servants, was a key feature of successful responses. The most perceptive responses explored moments of ambiguity, such as the ellipsis in 'she is beautiful. And yet...', linking this hesitation to Rochester's conflicted view of Antoinette as both alluring and alien. Others connected this to later descriptions of her 'sad, dark alien eyes,' demonstrating a clear understanding of how Rhys uses narrative voice and imagery to shape meaning.

Question 12

NATASHA THRETHEWEY: *Native Guard*

- (a) There were insufficient responses to this question to effectively comment on performance.
- (b) This question was quite popular. A number of candidates demonstrated limited knowledge of the text and its historical context. Some incorrectly assumed the persona was still enslaved or conflated the speaker with the poet, leading them to miss the ironies of the second sonnet. More careful responses worked methodically through the poems, commenting on the epigraph, the role of memory, and the persona's distinction between unreliable memory and his preference for keeping a factual 'record.' Most candidates adopted an explanatory approach, focusing on how history is 'inscribed' on the persona's back and how half rations deny Black soldiers the dignity afforded to white soldiers. Only a few responses explored the more complex idea of racial separation being challenged through the shared journal, where the persona's history intersects with that of a white Confederate, suggesting overlapping and entangled narratives. There was little engagement with form. Few candidates commented on the sonnet structure, the sequencing of the poems, or the effect of repeating the final line of one sonnet as the opening line of the next. There were few references to the wider sequence or to other poems concerned with memorialising black soldiers' contributions to the Civil War. Less successful responses relied heavily on paraphrase and showed limited analysis of language or structure. Some, however, demonstrated emerging insight, particularly in metaphorical readings. For example, a few recognised how 'memory dulls lash for the master and sharpens it for a slave' reflects unequal psychological burdens, and how the 'journal full of someone else's words' evokes erasure, displacement, and contested histories that resonate beyond the historical setting.

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 9695/43

Pre- and Post-1900 Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- Arguments are clearest when planned and shaped to specifically address the given question with a clear sense of development from introduction through to conclusion.
- Analysis of effects of form, structure and language should be rooted in the text and supported appropriately.
- Candidates must complete one answer from **Section A** and one answer from **Section B**, ensuring that one text covered is poetry and the other is prose.

General comments

Examiners found clear evidence of thoughtful personal response, the ability to consider and discuss abstract ideas and concepts and detailed analytical engagement presented by many candidates. There are various different approaches taken by candidates when initiating their arguments. Strong openings tended to take a specific view, establishing a clear direction concisely and with the question centrally positioned. The best conclusions feature a sense of summary, evaluation and, in some cases, a personal summation of what has been demonstrated during the course of the answer.

Some candidates wrote quite detailed introductions covering context, lists of concerns and methods with some brief response to the question to suggest the focus they were going to take. This was often helpful in structuring the response. Many of these, however, simply repeated this introduction word for word as a conclusion, or allocated the last half page to summarising their answer when they could have been developing ideas and building analysis a little further, with some brief conclusion of the argument at the end.

Planning answers is a skill that leads to effective use of the exam time, but it is important that plans do not take up more time in construction than the answers themselves.

Examiners continue to see a number of rubric infringements where candidates do not meet the terms of the exam rubric. This paper requires candidates to answer on one poetry text and one prose text, with one coming from **Section A** (pre-1900) and one from **Section B** (post-1900). It is therefore not possible to write an essay on *Pride and Prejudice* and another on *Beloved*, for example, as both are prose texts. In this instance, the examiner will mark both answers, but the rubric infringement means that only the higher of the two marks will be credited. It is important that centres check carefully to ensure that texts studied meet the exam rubric for this specification.

In terms of analysis there was some effective use of technical terminology such as irony, anaphora, parallelism, volta and epiphany and a better understanding than in previous sessions of the effects available using free verse. Many candidates have clearly engaged in learning rhetorical devices – all those terms for different kinds of repetition based on the position of words such as epizeuxis and epistrophe or structural terms such as polysyndeton and asyndeton. The advantage of having these terms as part of an analytical approach is that they relate to aspects of a writer's craft. Importantly, the most beneficial use of these was when the word or effect was attached to specific textual detail and followed up by an analysis of how the device had an impact, for example in terms of tone, emphasis, pace or insight. The least effective approaches to analysis include listing terminology without exemplification or explanation or name-dropping technical features tangentially alongside paraphrase or narrative commentary.

When using the context of a text in answers, it is important that points bear relevance to both the question and the set text. Some excellent and apposite application of contextual detail was noted this series, particularly in relation to *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Conversely examiners reported seeing examples of contextual points that were not closely related to the text or question, for example

tenuous links to film versions of a text or loosely related associations made to texts from other papers on the syllabus.

In terms of **(b)** style questions, candidates seemed more confident dealing with the detail of poetry than prose with candidates demonstrating a sensitive appreciation of the effects of language and other devices. Many candidates appeared to find selecting and using detail from prose more challenging, with some resorting to unsupported commentary at times. Often responses to both poetry and prose **(b)** questions were restricted to the given poems and passages. An ability to refer to some significant detail in the wider text or one or two other poems often helped to anchor the given poem in the context of a poet's concerns or support a discussion of characteristic methods and approaches.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Pre-1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 1

JANE AUSTEN: *Pride and Prejudice*

- (a)** This was a very popular question. Most responses focused on Darcy's relationship with Elizabeth, but the strongest answers were distinguished by precise, well-chosen quotations and detailed knowledge of key moments. These responses traced how the reader's understanding of Darcy develops through Elizabeth's perspective, referencing scenes such as the ball, his apparent treatment of Wickham, the failed proposal, the explanatory letter, Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley, and Darcy's role in arranging Lydia's marriage, which he admits he undertook for Elizabeth's sake. Unlike more straightforward narrative accounts of their relationship, these answers showed clear awareness of what characters think and feel at specific moments, including Darcy's later humility when he thanks Elizabeth for teaching him an important lesson and acknowledges how her reprimand about his lack of gentlemanly behaviour 'tortured' him. A small number of candidates also noted early hints of Darcy's partiality for Elizabeth, such as his coolness towards Miss Bingley and his refusal to join in her criticism of Elizabeth's appearance. Darcy's affectionate relationship with Georgiana, as filtered through Elizabeth's observations, was used to present him as capable of genuine feeling and to explain his willingness to protect Lydia's reputation. Some also referred to his refusal to promise Lady Catherine that he would never marry Elizabeth. Very good responses explored how Darcy and Elizabeth reciprocally challenge one another, overcoming pride and prejudice and becoming better people. The strongest essays integrated context and analysis, linking Darcy's judgement of Mrs Bennet's lack of decorum in relation to Regency social norms with the transactional nature of marriage, and recognising Austen's initially unflattering presentation of Darcy as a critique of both character flaws and restrictive social conventions. Other good answers offered perceptive contrasts between Darcy and Bingley to shape reader expectations or discussed Austen's use of letters as instances of vulnerability that complicate Darcy's seemingly cold exterior.
- (b)** This was also a very popular question with many responses seen at different levels. The strongest answers offered detailed and sensitive exploration of Elizabeth's fears and doubts. The best candidates closely analysed her dialogue with the Gardiners, effectively juxtaposing Elizabeth's anxiety and realism with their attempts to reassure her through temperance and optimism. These responses demonstrated strong understanding of character dynamics and the emotional tension within the extract. Good answers were well supported by close language analysis and contextual awareness. Some offered original interpretations, such as presenting Wickham as a figure embodying the dangers of patriarchal and transactional marriage arrangements or viewing Mr Gardiner as a surrogate father figure whose composed authority contrasts with Mr Bennet's negligence. These responses integrated context thoughtfully, framing marriage as an economic transaction within Regency society and linking this to Austen's critique of social institutions designed to protect the landed gentry. Most candidates addressed three central issues: the extract's significance to the plot and the potential consequences of Lydia's elopement for the Bennet family; the contrast between the Gardiners' responsible conduct and the foolishness of the Bennet parents; and Elizabeth's perceptive assessment of Wickham's mercenary motives, alongside her criticism of her father's failures and Lydia's upbringing. Less confident answers tended to drift into general discussion of social context such as marriage, class, reputation and income, often with limited reference to the extract itself, though some made brief links to the wider novel, such as Charlotte Lucas's marriage to Mr Collins. Stronger candidates maintained close

focus on the passage, analysing aspects of Austen's style. They explored how repetition and emotional cadence in Elizabeth's speech convey urgency and self-awareness, particularly her recognition of past prejudice in favour of Wickham and her knowledge of his earlier attempt to elope with Georgiana for financial gain.

Question 2

GEOFFREY CHAUCER: *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale*

- (a) There were very few answers to this question on Chaucer's presentation of different attitudes of men towards women. Some responses dealt with the Merchant's view of marriage as a starting point with some developing arguments and textual support. Better answers explored the Merchant's Tale as an anti-female tract borne out of the spite of the Merchant with some successful exploration of the various levels of irony at play in Januarie's thoughts about a wife and his belief that they should be moulded like 'warm wax' compared to the reality of May and her 'rebellious behaviour'.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to effectively comment on performance.

Question 3

JOHN DONNE: Selected Poems

- a) There were several responses to this question on Donne's presentation of personal conflict in his religious poetry. Responses varied in quality. Stronger responses demonstrated assured knowledge of all three texts and sustained comparison. These essays explored different forms of personal conflict, particularly Donne's internal struggle between sin, faith, death and salvation. Candidates analysed aspects of structure and language, citing examples of violent imagery and imperatives used to dramatise spiritual turmoil and the shifting relationship with God. Some confident responses focused on *Holy Sonnets* 2 and 14, offering close language analysis to distinguish between inward conflict and Donne's more challenging stance towards God. The best of these answers was strengthened by engagement with relevant critical views, evaluating the idea that Donne wavers between confidence in salvation and revulsion at his own sinfulness. One answer focused on *Batter my heart*, offering a clear summary of its central argument with some analysis of Donne's forceful language, but discussion of *Death be not proud* and *Since she whom I loved* was more explanatory, with few connections drawn between the poems.
- b) This question was quite popular, and responses were generally confident, with several strong answers seen. One thoughtful response was notable for its effective, focused introduction, opening with a critical quotation and establishing a clear argument about the transformative power of meaningful relationships in *Air and Angels*. This line of argument was supported by well-chosen references to *The Good Morrow* and *The Sun Rising*, demonstrating secure wider-text knowledge. A number of very good responses made precise and purposeful links to other poems in the collection, including *Elegy VII*, which was used effectively to contrast functional and dysfunctional relationships. Some moderately successful candidates structured their essays clearly, often adopting a three-part approach: two sections comparing other poems from the collection and a final, more developed section offering close analysis of *Air and Angels*. These responses balanced comparison with detailed textual analysis and showed a clear understanding of Donne's exploration of love and transformation.

Question 4

GEORGE ELIOT: *Middlemarch*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment effectively on performance.
- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment effectively on performance.

Question 5

THOMAS HARDY: *Far from the Madding Crowd*

- (a) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment effectively on performance.

- (b) There were insufficient answers to this question to comment effectively on performance.

Question 6

WALT WHITMAN: Selected Poems from *Leaves of Grass*

- (a) This question on attitudes to war in Whitman's poetry produced a wide range of responses. Some straightforward answers selected a limiting route using poems such as *Beat! Beat! Drums!* or *I Hear America Singing*, employing generalised discussion of enthusiasm, unity or patriotism with little depth. More successful responses chose poems such as *Beat! Beat! Drums!*, *The Wound-Dresser* and *O Captain! My Captain!* and explored how Whitman's poetry, even when apparently patriotic, is often deeply critical of war and its effects on individuals. Stronger candidates developed cohesive arguments by threading poems together through perspective and tone. One effective response argued that war is initially presented as evidence of national development, noting the atypical rhythm and urgent tone of *Beat! Beat! Drums!* before complicating this view through analysis of *The Wound-Dresser*. This answer embedded contextual and critical viewpoints and showed awareness of Whitman's complexity as a poet capable of holding conflicting attitudes.

The best responses traced a progression in Whitman's portrayal of war: from initial excitement and collective fervour, through personal loss in *O Captain! My Captain!*, to the intimate, harrowing suffering of soldiers in *The Wound-Dresser*. Some also discussed *How Solemn as One by One*, highlighting Whitman's empathy and humanity as he addresses individual soldiers directly and asserts the endurance of the soul despite physical destruction. Less successful answers broadened the discussion too far, focusing on general reflections on life or national identity rather than shaping material closely to the question.

- (b) This was a popular question, though most responses were in the lower levels of achievement. Candidates generally focused on thematic interpretation, reading the poem as an exploration of birth, growth and development. The 'he-bird' and 'she-bird' were commonly linked to adolescence or emotional maturation. However, engagement with language and poetic method was often limited, with many responses relying heavily on paraphrase or biographical discussion of Whitman rather than analysis of poetic style. Most candidates identified features such as free verse, nature imagery, enjambment, stream of consciousness and links to Transcendentalism, but these were frequently listed rather than explored in relation to meaning. Some commented on the cradle as a symbol of origin or departure, and a few discussed ideas of the divine in nature, though often in general terms. Stronger responses moved beyond description to interpretation. One good answer explored how the poem charts the speaker's artistic awakening, arguing that the language conveys Whitman's love of words and invites the reader to share a sense of awe. This response perceptively described the poem as a movement from macrocosm to microcosm, linking the natural scene to poetic inspiration. Another strong response demonstrated confident wider reading by connecting the poem to *A Noiseless Patient Spider*, an approach most candidates did not attempt. The most sensitive answers explored the speaker's developing poetic identity, focusing on the use of flashback and the childhood memory of 'peering, absorbing, translating.' These responses recognised how the poem reflects Whitman's understanding of creativity as something rooted in early experience and attentive engagement with the natural world.

Section B: Post 1900 Poetry and Prose

Question 7

LOUISE GLÜCK: Selected Poems from *The Wild Iris*

- (a) There were a few responses to this question on Glück's use of different voices. A small number of responses were notably sophisticated. One strong answer identified a 'trialogue of voices', the divine, nature and humankind, arguing that their interaction forms a critique of the human lapsarian condition. Strong responses selected poems judiciously and analysed them in detail, demonstrating clear conceptual control. Particularly effective was the observation that the phrase 'unreachable father' undermines the intimacy implied by 'father,' signalling emotional distance rather than comfort. Another effective answer examined the shared tone of complaint across the three voices and considered the extent to which nature offers consolation in contrast to the silence or remoteness of the divine. These responses showed confident close reading, insightful comparison and a strong grasp of thematic complexity.

- (b) This was a popular question and candidates for the most part engaged securely with *Love in Moonlight*. The best responses engaged fully with the poem's ambiguity, debating whether this reflected light is ultimately positive: the soul or love may shine only briefly, yet it still shines, despite the moon being described paradoxically as both a stone and 'that much of a living thing.' Candidates analysed shifts in tone, recognising irony or a sober acceptance that through the act of mutual confession and exposure of despair, the speakers paradoxically 'acquired souls.' One interpretation saw the poem's circular argument as mirroring inner turmoil and human vulnerability, while the natural imagery suggested that such emotional exposure is nonetheless valuable. Some candidates also linked the poem to more overtly religious pieces in the collection, particularly those questioning the authenticity of love. Less confident responses focused too narrowly on the word 'forces' in the opening line, leading to generalised personal reflection and limited engagement with the wider collection, despite some language analysis. Some very effective responses made precise and confident links between the poem and the wider collection, particularly drawing parallels with *The White Lilies*. Both poems were seen to express despair, a desire to impose that despair on another, and a shared craving for creation, with light emerging from darkness as a central image. Strong analysis focused on the effect of moonlight, noting how it blurs outlines and details, and explored the implications of love or the soul as something that reflects light from another source rather than generating its own.

Question 8

JAMES JOYCE: *Dubliners*

- (a) A number of answers were seen to this question on how characters reach an understanding of themselves and their place in the world. Most candidates were confident in their knowledge of Joyce's preoccupation with paralysis and use of epiphanies. In their discussions of the characters in *An Encounter*, *Araby*, *Eveline*, *A Painful Case* and *The Dead* they discussed their fleeting awareness of themselves, and their condition. They examined the extent to which the characters were unable or unwilling to act on their sudden flashes of self-knowledge or understanding because these epiphanies exposed rather than resolved their feelings of entrapment and lack of self-worth. Those with detailed knowledge of their chosen stories and aptly chosen quotations did well.
- (b) This was a popular question, and responses demonstrated varying levels of success. Some candidates offered competent analysis, such as interpreting the school as a metaphor for restraint, with irony in its failure to inspire despite its intended purpose. However, these answers often lacked sufficient focus on the extract itself, limiting achievement to the middle of the mark range. Other responses explored the attraction of 'The Apache Chief' as a symbol of excitement and freedom, linking it to the boys' desire for escape and demonstrating some awareness of how this episode ultimately ends in disappointment, reinforcing Joyce's themes of paralysis and missed opportunity. One moderately successful response showed strong contextual understanding, discussing the impact of religious and institutional control, Catholic repression of youthful curiosity, and wider social stagnation. Some responses effectively contrasted the boys' interest in adventure comics with the dryness of Roman history and noted figures such as the 'wretched scribbler' as emblematic of moral and social decay. However, these responses often struggled to balance close analysis of the extract with reference to the wider collection. The strongest answers demonstrated how Joyce's narrative style itself embodies themes of entrapment, frustration and yearning for escape, integrating textual detail with broader thematic understanding.

Question 9

TONI MORRISON: *Beloved*

- (a) This question was attempted by a number of candidates and responses tended to be highly engaged and informed. They demonstrated secure contextual knowledge of the real-life case of Margaret Garner, whose attempt to kill her children and herself rather than see them returned to slavery underpinned Morrison's narrative. Strong answers argued that Morrison uses Sethe's infanticide to convey the extremity of her desperation, presenting slavery as worse than death and deliberately challenging conventional ideals of motherhood. Candidates commented effectively on Morrison's fragmented narrative structure, noting the gradual revelation of the murder: from the baby's ghost haunting 124, to Sethe's reaction to the woman calling herself *Beloved*, and finally to the arrival of schoolteacher. Assured responses observed that the first full account of the event is

delivered through a distanced narrative voice, aligned with schoolteacher and his nephews, mirroring their shock and incomprehension. This structural choice was linked to the novel's central ambiguity surrounding Beloved's identity. The most successful essays explored how Beloved becomes a catalyst for Sethe's 're-memory,' forcing her to confront trauma, guilt and possessive love before reconnecting with life and accepting that she herself is her own 'best thing.' Some candidates also examined later retellings of the infanticide through Stamp Paid's revelations to Paul D, analysing the impact on his relationship with Sethe. Other strong responses focused on the paradox of infanticide as both an act of love and violence, and how it shadows the entire novel, affecting all characters. Structural analysis of the disrupted timeline highlighted its reflection of trauma and the novel's gothic intensity. A few candidates incorporated psychoanalytic ideas about grief and trauma to explain Beloved's return, supported by close analysis of key infanticide scenes.

- (b) There were insufficient responses to this question to comment effectively on performance.

Question 10

GABRIEL OKARA: Selected Poems from *Collected Poems*

- (a) There were insufficient responses to this question to comment effectively on performance.
- (b) This popular question on the poem *You Laughed and Laughed and Laughed* led many candidates to focus on Okara's exploration of cultural conflict, often comparing it with *Piano and Drums*. Stronger responses confidently moved between the two poems, contrasting the assertive, victorious voice defending traditional culture and identity in *You Laughed and Laughed and Laughed* with the more reflective, conflicted persona in *Piano and Drums* who feels caught between African tradition and Western influence. Successful candidates offered sensitive analysis of auditory and visual imagery, particularly the mockery implied in the 'motor car misfiring,' the intimacy of 'opening up my mystic / inside,' and the violence of driving a car into it. They commented on the cumulative impact of the repeated 'You laughed and laughed and laughed' and how this prepares for the decisive tonal shift in 'And now it is my turn to laugh.' Many appreciated how the poem's structure is built on opposition, contrasting the coloniser's, 'ice-block laughter', with the persona's laughter associated with fire and power. They explored how the freezing of the eyes, ears, and tongue symbolises damaged perception and understanding, and how fire imagery suggests the possibility of 'thawing,' leading to humility in the question 'Why so?' Candidates also engaged thoughtfully with natural imagery, enjoying the idea of being 'owned by the living / warmth of the earth,' experienced through 'naked feet,' showing a deep cultural connection to the land. Less skilful responses still demonstrated clear understanding, with some awareness of poetic methods and effects. Strong answers explored contrasts between the speaker and the 'you,' the differing types of laughter, and how the poem operates as both a rebuttal to colonial mockery and a proclamation of African identity. The best essays discussed structure, including the volta at stanza eight, repetition, and derogatory imagery, making sustained, assured comparisons with the wider selection.

Question 11

JEAN RHYS: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

- (a) This was a popular question on a popular text and was well done by most candidates. Responses explored Rochester as a complex and conflicted figure, presenting him as both an agent of oppression and a victim of forces beyond his control. Many candidates examined his relationship with Antoinette, focusing on his renaming of her as Bertha and her eventual imprisonment as acts of domination that align him with colonial and patriarchal power. Alongside expected criticism of Rochester as a coloniser, some responses offered more sympathetic readings. These argued that Daniel Cosway's manipulation exploits Rochester's vulnerability as a disinherited second son, highlighting his insecurity, marginal status within his family, and sense of powerlessness. Several candidates supported this view with close analysis of language, particularly from the episode in which the couple leave for England, to illustrate Rochester's alienation and emotional detachment. One response insightfully discussed the reader's shifting reaction to Rochester, moving between sympathy and anger. The most perceptive answers embraced this ambiguity, arguing that while Rochester initially invites empathy, he ultimately repels it through his cruelty towards women, especially his psychological and emotional abuse of Antoinette. Acts such as renaming her and controlling her movements were seen as decisive moments where sympathy gives way to moral condemnation. One striking interpretation suggested that Rochester effectively 'sells his soul' for a

dowry, encapsulating the ethical compromise at the heart of his character. The best responses demonstrated mature, nuanced reasoning and a strong grasp of the novel's moral and psychological complexity.

- (b) Very few candidates attempted this question, and performance varied widely. The strongest responses featured detailed literary analysis, focusing closely on the passage itself. These candidates examined the dramatic contrasts in dialogue, Christophine's symbolic role, and the significance of naming as a form of power, particularly the foreshadowing inherent in Antoinette's renaming and psychological disintegration. More successful answers analysed the passage in detail, commenting on the intensity of the dialogue and the fraught relationship between Antoinette and Christophine. They explored how Rhys conveys Antoinette's desperation, including her self-conscious awareness of her own voice, and considered the effect of bracketed comments in shaping tone and emotional vulnerability. Some perceptive responses recognised the heavy foreshadowing in the scene, noting that both women are ultimately right: Christophine cannot make Antoinette's husband love her, and he does come to hate her. Most candidates addressed the renaming of Antoinette as Bertha, linking it to female helplessness within a marriage lacking economic independence. Less successful responses tended to discuss patriarchy in broad terms, with limited reference to Rhys's narrative methods. One very good response engaged with Christophine's nuanced judgement that Antoinette's husband is 'not a bad man', highlighting the moral complexity of the scene.

Question 12

NATASHA THRETHEWEY: *Native Guard*

- (a) There were insufficient responses to this question to effectively comment on performance.
- (b) This question attracted a range of responses. Most candidates demonstrated a strong understanding of the poem's social and personal context, particularly the racist reality faced by the speaker's mother. Candidates explored loaded language such as 'mongrel,' the dominance of white perspectives, and the irony of the final lines, including the use of 'our' in the national anthem to highlight how racism can simultaneously include and exclude within a supposedly unified nation. There was perceptive analysis of the poet's methods, including the use of hyphens to convey hesitation and uncertainty, and discussion of the title, noting the omission of 'of' as a marker of disconnection. Candidates also commented insightfully on the naming of the baby, showing how something typically positive becomes negative, and on the symbolism of white dolls and their impact on the mother. Many responses effectively embedded personal and social context into interpretation. Stronger answers recognised historical allusions, such as references to 1966 and miscegenation laws, linking these to the poet's biracial identity and its effect on her mother. However, despite this proficiency, wider reading beyond the set poem was generally limited.