

ENGLISH LITERATURE (9 TO 1)

Paper 0477/01
Poetry and Prose

Key messages

Successful responses:

- show a detailed knowledge of poems and prose texts studied
- answer the question
- provide textual support
- include detailed exploration of the ways in which writers achieve their effects.

Less successful responses:

- have a sketchy or limited knowledge of texts studied
- lose focus on the question set
- make unsupported assertions
- describe or simply identify writer's techniques.

General comments

Examiners reported much evidence of candidates' personal engagement with, and enjoyment of, the poems and prose texts they had studied. Occasionally, there was a sense that prose extracts were being approached as 'unseen' texts in answers which lacked an awareness of the wider context of the novel or story. There were very few rubric errors.

Textual knowledge

The most successful responses showed a detailed knowledge of texts and contained well-selected references (both direct quotations and indirect references) to support the chosen line of argument. These responses selected judiciously from the poems or prose extracts printed on the question paper and avoided attempts to write exhaustively on every aspect of either poem or extract. This latter approach often led to both a descriptive approach and a loss of focus on the question.

Focus on the question

The strongest responses kept the question in sight throughout the response, with candidates selecting their material and tailoring it to meet the specific demands of the question. Less successful responses sometimes showed a detailed understanding of character or theme but lost focus on the question, often failing to take note of key words such as 'powerful', 'striking' and 'vivid', which are designed to elicit candidates' responses to qualities of the writing. There were instances, too, of candidates losing focus on the question as they wrote excessively about background material rather than the text itself.

Candidates are advised to address the key words of question straight away and not bother with 'courtesy' introductions (e.g. 'In this essay, I am going to...'). Likewise, conclusions that simply re-state, often at length, the main points of the answer are best avoided. Teachers should remind candidates that answering the question is more important than following a pre-conceived idea about what constitutes a model essay.

Writers' effects

Candidates who had a detailed knowledge of their texts were better able to analyse closely and convincingly the ways in which writers achieve their effects. In the case of poetry and passage-based questions, it is possible to quote from the text printed in the question paper. For the prose general essay questions, those

candidates who had learnt at least some direct quotation were better placed to probe critically a writer's use of language.

However, when considering a writer's use of language, there is no particular merit in:

- simply identifying or logging writers' use of devices
- merely listing those words belonging to what is often termed a 'semantic' or 'lexical' field
- writing about possible connotations of words without considering their meanings within context.

Personal response

Strong individual responses were characterised by thoughtful and perceptive comments argued and supported with care. These responses engaged directly with those words in questions designed to elicit a personal response to the writing.

Less confident candidates offered less in the way of personal response and more in the way of established readings of poems and the more traditional prose texts; these answers tended to rely on explanation and unsupported assertion rather than critical analysis.

In some responses, personal response was limited to comments on how 'relatable' a character or situation was.

Question-specific comments

Question 1

Praise Song For My Mother

Good responses identified the metaphors 'water', 'moon's eye' and 'sunrise' and candidates were able to relate this 'nature' imagery to qualities possessed by her mother, i.e. essential for life, as a watchful eye in dark times and giving her a reason to get up in the morning and approach the day with optimism. On the fourth stanza, many made valid points that fish need gills to breathe and survive, and that the poet is nostalgic for the lovely food her mother cooked. The final line was also well-handled with observations that they might have been her mother's last direct words to her and that she was being encouraged to enjoy and experience life. One excellent response noted the plural as significant, suggesting her mother is encouraging her to think of infinite opportunities. Less successful responses tried to identify language features without relating them to the question or the poem's deeper implications.

Question 2

Anthem For Doomed Youth

Weaker responses were characterised by candidates spending too long recounting (in a heartfelt way) all that they had learnt about the awful conditions in the war and the waste of life, though without relating their comments to the poem or the question. These general comments were not incorrect but were not supported by, or rooted in, the detail of the poem. Most candidates were able to make some relevant comment about the 'cattle' simile. Those with a confident understanding of the rituals of mourning that feature in the poem offered more perceptive responses. Few offered a convincing analysis of the ways in which Owen uses sounds to powerful effect in the poem. A discriminating factor was the extent to which candidates responded to the ending of the poem.

Question 3

Coming Home

Most candidates commented on each character, but weaker responses were limited by simply working through the poem. Candidates were on stronger ground where they focused on Sheers' feelings. There were some useful comments about why the mother's hug is 'awkward' for him, suggesting that she will always see him as her 'child', no matter what age he is, and this is not comfortable for him. The responses which explored how Owen uses language 'vividly' to convey his feelings provided more confident analyses since they were rooted more securely in the detail of the poem. Those who grasped that the 'tune (the grandfather) plays faster' indicates a progressively shaky hand often took this further to suggest Sheers must be feeling

apprehensive about his grandfather's impending death. In weaker responses there was confusion about how long the son had been away, with some assuming he had not been home since he was a child, ignoring the clue of 'each year'.

Question 4

Father Returning Home

Weaker responses did not move beyond the literal, leading to misunderstanding. An example of this was that 'unseeing eyes' meant that he was blind or nearly so, though many candidates did recognise that he was too tired or familiar with the scene outside the train to notice it. The most successful responses linked it to his feeling of 'estrangement' later in the poem. The majority worked through the poem detailing in a general way his long day, dirty clothes, poor diet, lack of care from his family and desire to be on his own. Few, however, commented in depth on the poem's images or addressed 'striking' impressions. Stronger responses commented on his dreams including past and future relatives but not the present ones. Some managed to link his dreams to his disenchantment with the current 'man-made world', and some made a good attempt at analysing the 'word dropped from a long sentence' simile, for example, suggesting that he is small and insignificant in the world, that he does not stand out, that no-one will notice if he is not there.

Question 5

Lunchtime Lecture

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 6

Friesian Bull

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 7

No Longer At Ease extract

Stronger responses, which focused on the question, commented on feeling 'disgusted' with Obi for 'cheating' on Clara and for both Obi and Christopher for treating the Irish girls as 'objects'. Christopher was identified as a bad influence on Obi, and some commented on the word 'appropriated' as emphasising his attitude to women. Weaker responses spent too much time making judgemental comments on the characters' morality rather than focusing on Achebe's writing, and a number of candidates assumed that 'Mother' in the extract was the girls' mother. A small number did, however, attempt some exploration of language, for example, that 'discovered' suggests that they are artefacts to be found. Very good responses grasped the deeper implications not only about Obi's relationship with Clara but also the underlying influence of colonialism.

Question 8

No Longer At Ease essay

The quality of the response depended on the strength of a candidate's knowledge of the text. More successful responses showed a sound knowledge of the scenes between Obi and Clara, his mother and father. Most were aware of his mother's threatened suicide. Weaker responses did not explore the detail of the way in which Obi presents the relationship with his parents or show understanding of the confusion between religion and culture/traditional beliefs when considering Obi's loyalties to his family. This particularly applied to Obi's father; only the best responses understood that although he is a Christian he still holds to traditional beliefs. The least successful responses worked their way through the novel, starting with Obi and Clara's first meeting, continuing with the voyage back home and a long narration of their difficulties, moving onto Obi's bribery and downfall – with only glancing references to the question.

Question 9

Mansfield Park extract

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 10

Mansfield Park essay

Many candidates worked their way through the main characters with a degree of understanding. Weaker responses lacked specific textual reference, while better responses made good use of references and quotations from throughout the novel. Most candidates thought that the staging of the play was a bad idea, though only the best responses explored its significance within the novel.

Question 11

My Antonia extract

More successful responses focused on the physicality of the struggle and the injuries sustained by Jim, with a few commenting on the farcical nature of his escape. There was some thoughtful consideration of the effect this incident has on Jim's feelings for Antonia. Less successful responses wrote of the content of the extract in general narrative terms, without exploring the words and images that contribute to the drama of the moment.

Question 12

My Antonia essay

Good responses showed secure knowledge of the novel and a sympathetic personal response towards Antonia, identifying the change in her behaviour when she moved to town and recognising her vulnerability. Most were aware of the overarching significance of her friendship with Jim and his influence in her life. However, it was necessary to focus on 'Cather's portrayal' in order to satisfy the AO3 criterion, looking at the perspective from which events in the novel are described and the language used to describe Antonia's experiences. The least successful answers offered a potted history of her life, without achieving a close focus on this part of the question.

Question 13

Hard Times extract

Candidates approached this question with enthusiasm, showing knowledge of how the scene fitted into the wider context of the novel and expressing a lively personal response towards the character of Bounderby. Better answers focused on Bounderby's aggressive behaviour and language as contrasted with Mrs. Pegler's affectionate tone; a few responses drew attention to the way in which Dickens guides the reader's response via the authorial voice. The strongest answers divided their response equally between the question's key words 'unpleasant' and 'ridiculous' and were able to find convincing evidence for each.

Question 14

Hard Times essay

Few responses were seen. Candidates were clearly aware of the Coketown/circus dichotomy within the novel, and in some cases this helped them towards gaining some credit towards AO3. Weaker responses were characterised by vague and general references to characters such as Sissy and Mr. Sleary without being able to pinpoint particular scenes or dialogue, so were not sufficient to achieve the higher bands on this question.

Question 15

Spies extract

The strongest responses focused on 'dramatic' and made some valid points; these candidates were able to place it securely within the context of the novel as well as exploring Frayn's dramatic techniques in detail. Those who explored Stephen's reliance on sounds to give him clues in the darkness, as well as the way the narrative voice alternates between the older Stefan's explanations and young Stephen's confusion, were rewarded for their close reading. In weaker responses, there was confusion about what exactly was happening in the extract, who was involved and how it fitted in to the other events in the novel.

Question 16

Spies essay

Candidates approached this question with enthusiasm and evident knowledge, discussing Stephen's shift from early admiration of Mr. Hayward to subsequent fear, as we come to understand the meaning of the scarf around Mrs. Hayward's neck and Keith's violent behaviour in the den. The best responses explored not only Mr. Hayward's behaviour but his language, and the way in which the innocuous phrase 'old bean' becomes laced with menace as the novel progresses. Stronger responses considered these aspects in detail without lapsing into narrative, which proved to be the main weakness of less successful answers.

Question 17

Secret River extract

This was well answered on the whole, and candidates were able to identify a range of Thornhill's feelings. Weaker responses made uneven use of the extract, with more concentration on the first half than the second; in fact, the second, with its rich and detailed descriptions of Thornhill's Point, provided much material for evidence of Will's growing love of the land and anxiety to possess it for himself. There was much textual detail here to help candidates to answer the first part of the question: 'How does Grenville vividly convey'. The best responses made much of the final sentence: 'The thought of that point of land became a private thing, a bead of warmth in his heart'.

Question 18

Secret River essay

There were too few responses to make meaningful comment.

Question 19

The English Teacher extract

Good responses focussed both on the question and on the language of the extract. The best answers wrote sensitively about Krishna's happiness at finally communicating with Susila and how Death does not need to be the end. By contrast, weaker responses were too general and gave far too much background information without focus on the detail of the extract. Many made valid points about how this is a satisfying ending but without close enough reference to the text and language. Often in less successful responses there was a tendency to narrate Krishna's life up to this point, thereby summarising the book and neglecting the detail of the extract in order to address the question.

Question 20

The English Teacher essay

Candidates generally had a good overview, with details of the Headmaster's approach more readily given, and candidates enjoyed comparing this with the Mission School. They made sound contrasts between traditional and modern, between stolid and creative, between the modes of education in Albert Mission College and in the Headmaster's School. Many candidates remembered the incident about 'honours' being spelt incorrectly; however, weaker responses lacked specific textual evidence other than this. Less confident answers lapsed into a description of Krishna's teaching and boredom rather than the approach of the college

itself, and from there it was a short step to his unhappiness and lack of satisfaction with life, instead of sustaining a focus on the question.

Question 21

Games at Twilight

Most candidates worked through the extract, listing Ravi's changing feelings from fear and determination, through confusion and pride to despair and misery. These were competent attempts and usually supplemented with textual support, though sometimes rather pedestrian and list-like. Better responses focused on Ravi's thoughts and feelings, selecting and exploring appropriate detail from the extract. The strongest responses explored with some sensitivity Desai's use of language and narrative viewpoint.

Question 22

The Phoenix

Responses to this question were strongly personal and candidates appeared to enjoy exploring views on human nature in the light of this tale. Most were able to contrast Lord Strawberry and Poldero in their treatment of the phoenix; some also commented on the public's thirst for sensational events. Some thoughtful candidates pointed out that Lord Strawberry himself was flawed, since he took the phoenix from its natural habitat to satisfy his own desires. A few pointed out that the crowd who paid to see a bird burn to death was not entirely escaping censure. As always with the general question, the thoroughness and detail of reference to the text in support of the argument was a discriminating factor.

ENGLISH LITERATURE (9 TO 1)

Paper 0477/02
Drama

Key messages

- Successful responses included a concise introduction which focused on the set question and the main points being used to answer it.
- The strongest answers commented and analysed but avoided excessive explanation, description, historical background detail and narrative re-telling.
- Strong candidates showed detailed textual knowledge and made specific reference to the text, rather than dealing solely in generalities.
- A personal engagement with the text, ability to evaluate and an appreciation of the play on stage enlivened the most successful answers.

General comments

The most successful answers often began with the candidate focussing clearly on the question and citing three or four aspects of the text that they then used to answer it. The least successful either narrated the context at considerable length in answer to passage-based questions or gave historical information which often had no immediate relevance to the question.

Whilst most candidates understood the content of the set passages, some did not go beyond explaining what the characters say and do. This was most evident in the Shakespeare passages but this also applied to more contemporary texts. Many needed to make the leap from decoding the meaning to analysing the author's methods. A few pertinent comments on the stage effects used and on the diction, imagery or interaction between the characters would make a major difference to attainment.

Strong candidates knew the whole play in detail and could draw on a wide range of textual references, usually in the form of exact quotation from the play as a whole. In answer to the passage-based questions, they gave brief contextual information and used a considerable amount of short, pertinent quotation from the passage. It would benefit candidates on the open book Paper 32 to refer back briefly so that they are clear on the context of the passage within the play. As the passage is printed on the paper, there is no reason not to use quotations from it. Candidates should, however, be discouraged from merely using line numbers and expecting the Examiner to find the words to which they are referring.

Effective answers showed precise knowledge of plot and characterisation. There were instances this session of some candidates appearing to have only superficial knowledge of the set texts, sometimes referring to scenes in film versions that do not exist in the play or conversely not knowing scenes in the play which do not appear in a film. This puts them at a disadvantage. There were serious gaps in knowledge in some answers. For example, candidates confused the characters in *Macbeth* and knowledge of the plot was sometimes insecure.

There were some rubric infringements where candidates on 0486 22 answered two passage-based or two discursive questions, and answers were sometimes wrongly numbered. Some candidates do not number their questions at all or, on 2010 22, write the numbers of both questions on their set text on each question. It would be helpful to both candidates and Examiners if the importance of denoting clearly and unambiguously which question they are answering is emphasised. There were some candidates who mistimed their answers on 0486 22, spending too long on the first answer but otherwise there were few brief or imbalanced scripts.

Comments on specific questions

J.LAWRENCE and R.E.LEE: *Inherit the Wind*

Question 1

Strong answers to this question understood that the main drama centres on Bert's refusal to 'quit' and the revelation that Rachel has to testify against him. Her vivid speech about her fear of her father was also cited as contributing to the power of the scene. Drummond's gentle handling of the situation and support for Bert was appreciated in sensitive answers.

Less successful responses kept returning to the basic issue of evolution versus fundamentalist Christianity in the play, without properly considering the passage or the question. There was a misconception that Bert thought he was wrong about teaching evolution, rather than his doubting the wisdom of pursuing his beliefs through the court. Most, however, understood that Rachel's love for him was prompting her to prevent his further suffering by urging him to renege.

The power of the language in the scene could have been more fully explored, very few really picked up on the power of phrases such as '*They'll crucify me!*', '*genuinely panicked*' or '*unconscious of his presence or her surroundings*' or '*distraught*'.

Question 2

The majority of responses showed a sound knowledge of Reverend Brown's fundamentalist viewpoint, his relationship with his daughter, his opposition to Bert and his support of Brady. There was intelligent comment on how the unquestioning support he stirs up for Brady creates such drama when Brady falls from grace and perhaps leads Brady to underestimate the opposition. Most candidates knew that he damned his own daughter but his hell-fire preaching at the prayer meeting could have been explored more fully. Strong answers recognised how Brown's treatment of Tommy Stebbins had led Bert to doubt a faith which preached forgiveness but practised the opposite, an issue raised at a crucial moment in the trial. Stronger responses commented on the irony in the fact that those who followed him blindly were often ignorant or illiterate such as Elijah. Rachel's rejection of her father at the end of the play, creating a satisfying ending, was also left unconsidered by most.

A few candidates confused Brown and Brady and some ignored the rubric and used the information in the passage-based question. This rubric was designed to prevent candidates from writing an answer which was too narrow and thus putting themselves at a disadvantage. They should be reminded to take serious note of such instructions.

ARTHUR MILLER: *A View from the Bridge*

Question 3

There were many very successful answers to this question. Candidates responded to Miller's presentation of Rodolpho as a larger-than-life character with a personality and talents contrasting to both the more taciturn Marco and Eddie's longshoreman machismo. They saw his boasting and exaggeration as strikingly confident and amusing. Better answers went on to explore the striking response of both Catherine and Eddie to Rodolpho, foreshadowing the conflict to come. The underlying motivation for Eddie stopping Rodolpho singing and telling Catherine to remove her high heels was understood. Stage directions such as '*with iron control...his face puffed with trouble*', were well utilised to make the point clear. The symbolism of the Paper Doll lyrics and the exchange about sugar did not go unobserved.

Some candidates went too far in saying that Eddie was already deciding that Rodolpho was effeminate at this early stage and that singing was generally considered a female occupation in the 1950s. Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Tony Bennett and other crooners of Italian heritage might have found that surprising. Similarly, some candidates asserted that Rodolpho was already '*bowing to his passport*' and while an interesting case can be (and was) made for that interpretation, some candidates tended to take Eddie's later view of Rodolpho at face value.

Question 4

Sophisticated responses considered the extent to which Beatrice is totally admirable, rather than writing a rather bland assertion of her kindness and loyalty. Strong candidates balanced her sterling qualities with a

recognition that she is jealous of Catherine, that she promotes her niece's marriage to Rodolpho through some degree of self-interest and, arguably, does not act upon her perception of Eddie's feelings for Catherine until it is too late. Very few noted that she sees herself as partly to blame: '*Whatever happened we all done it*'. Some candidates quoted Catherine's criticism of her to prove that she was not a good wife to Eddie, which reveals more about Catherine's relationship with her uncle than it does a fair perception of her Aunt. Of course total admiration was an acceptable answer and many pointed out her perception and honesty, love for both her niece and her husband and her desperation to save him from himself at the end of the play.

There were misconceptions in less confident responses. Many thought that she attended Catherine and Rodolpho's wedding and that she slept on the floor to accommodate the cousins. Some candidates said she was silent throughout and never challenged Eddie, both palpably not the case. Sophisticated answers showed awareness that despite her perception, she was as powerless as Alfieri in stopping things taking their inevitable course

TERENCE RATTIGAN: *The Winslow Boy*

Question 5

Knowledge of the play as a whole played a part in the strongest answers to this question. Whilst commenting on the entertainment factor of the dancing, Dickie and Catherine's banter and jokes, their quick reaction to Arthur's entrance and his sardonic comments on the doctor, candidates noted that main issues of the play are raised throughout the scene. The financial impact of the court case is beginning to bite and take a toll on Arthur Winslow's health. John has postponed the wedding owing to his father's attitude to the scandal; women are more attractive if they suppress their opinions, especially if they are political. The foreshadowing of John's jilting of Catherine was fully explored in the strongest responses.

Less effective responses seemed unaware of the context of the passage and of these issues in the play. Some thought Ramsey Macdonald was another of Catherine's suitors.

Question 6

Confident responses to this question effectively used textual support for their views. Comments were made on: the difficulties Violet would face as an uneducated working class woman if she was fired by the Winslows; Miss Barnes managing to enter the male bastion of journalism only to write about curtains; Grace's lack of a voice in her patriarchal household; Catherine being disbarred by class, gender and education from properly paid employment and the political establishment. Though most commented on Catherine having to marry, few looked at her having to seriously consider Desmond's proposal and Sir Robert's attitude to women's suffrage did not feature in many answers.

Some responses showed knowledge of the issues facing women at the time the play is set but did not relate this sufficiently to events in the play itself.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Henry V*

Question 7

Most candidates found the characters' dispute about tactics in the middle of a war situation amusing and commented on the entertainment factor of the different national dialects. The volatility of Macmorris was contrasted with Gower's attempts at peacemaking. Less successful responses thought Macmorris was a Scot and that Jamy was going to get married, a misinterpretation of: 'that sall I, marry'. It was surprising that not more was said about Fluellen, who is a more well-established character in the play.

Question 8

The majority of candidates opted for this question on *Henry V*. Better answers explored the arguably 'ruthless' moments in the play: his response to the tennis balls; the execution of the traitors; the hanging of Bardolph; the speech to the Governor of Harfleur; the abandonment of Falstaff and the killing of the French prisoners. Henry's actions were justified in terms of what a king has to do contrasting with what would be counted as ruthless in a private man or alternatively contrasted with the band of brothers he creates with his men.

In some less successful responses the term 'ruthless' was not understood or the essay was one on leadership in general rather than focussing on the question set. Some candidates did not take into account that the traitors were guilty and that treason is punishable by death even in modern times, whereas the killing of the prisoners is against the code of war. Few mentioned that at the end of the ruthless Harfleur speech to the Governor, Henry says '*show mercy to them all*'. Some thought marrying Princess Catherine was ruthless, perhaps not grasping the political realities of a peace treaty.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Macbeth*

Question 9

There were some high quality responses to this question which recognised Macbeth's state of mind being reflected in his duplicitous dialogue with Banquo. Candidates understood the irony of Macbeth's exhortations for Banquo to attend the feast but knew that the audience is not yet aware of Macbeth's plan to murder him, though their possible suspicions are confirmed in Macbeth's soliloquy. Strong candidates observed his deflection of suspicion from himself to Duncan's sons. Better answers commented not only on what was revealed of his state of mind in the soliloquy but also on the powerful language Shakespeare uses to convey this. Comments on '*stick deep...fruitless...barren...unlineal...seeds*' and the repetition and exclamation demonstrated an understanding of Macbeth's reasons for fearing Banquo and the depth of this fear. Better answers also looked at his comparison between himself and Banquo and that the latter had the wisdom to act in safety, hence threatening his hold on the crown.

There were many common misconceptions. Many candidates did not realise that Macbeth is the king at this point in the play. The reference to Mark Antony and Caesar was referred to as a biblical allusion and many thought that Mark Antony has betrayed Caesar. '*Prophet-like*' was mistakenly seen as referring to Banquo rather than to the witches. Several candidates did not understand the convention of the soliloquy and thought that Macbeth was talking to the servant or that soliloquising was a sign of insanity. Similarly they misinterpreted the '*Who's there?*' at the end of the passage as paranoia, rather than him acknowledging the arrival of the assassins. Less successful answers either narrated events leading up to this passage, or went beyond it to make lengthy comment on Banquo's ghost. Some wrote well on the conversation with Banquo but ignored the soliloquy or vice-versa. In general, although most candidates understood the passage, closer attention to the language would have raised the level of most responses.

Question 10

A secure starting point in response to this question was to know who Malcolm was. A significant number of candidates confused him with Macduff or even Fleance. The next requirement was to know something of what he did in the play. Most candidates knew that he fled after his father's murder and most thought this was a sign of cowardice rather than of astute political acumen, missing the point that the dead guards appeared to be the culprits so there was no murderer to be apprehended. Some answers did not venture much beyond this and a generalised response with little reference to events in the play was a characteristic answer to this question in weaker responses.

The strongest candidates could quote Malcolm's reasons for escaping from Macbeth's castle, '*there's daggers in men's smiles*', explored his reasons for testing Macduff and the way in which he does this, commented on the alliance he had made with the English (not British) king, analysed his manipulation of Macduff to avenge his family, saw his military prowess and the fulfilment of the prophecy in making Birnam Wood move and commented on his humility, as evidenced by his thanking of the captain who saves him in the early scenes, and gracious acceptance of the throne at the end of the play. Better answers also looked at the imagery of medicine, symbolising his purgation of sick Scotland perishing under Macbeth's tyranny.

There were misconceptions in less successful answers that he was not a warrior. A few misunderstood the scene of his testing Macduff, believing that he was all the things that he later admits are lies. Stronger candidates saw this as a sign he would be a better king than his father who only ever saw the good in people.

ENGLISH LITERATURE (9 TO 1)

<p>Paper 0477/03 Unseen Comparison</p>

Key messages

- It was encouraging to see many candidates attempt the Prose response in this session.
- Skills of interpretation and argument are as important as close reading in this paper.
- Candidates are integrating context within their arguments.
- Comparison is usually well-sustained and at the heart of the task.
- The quality of written communication is generally high.

General comments

The design brief for this paper was to integrate all the additional requirements for UK 9–1 English Literature qualifications within one exercise. Candidates' responses should therefore address both comparison and contextualisation within a well-argued response, which is also assessed under AO5, the accuracy and effectiveness of written communication, spelling, punctuation and grammar.

There is detailed guidance from the Principal Examiner about how to address all the relevant Assessment Objectives for the subject through the response to comparing two unseen texts in the June 2018 Principal Examiners' Report to teachers. Good responses need to be based on careful reading and good planning, and there is increasing evidence that candidates are now making good use their reading time. A concise and well-planned essay is more effective than a diffuse and inconsistent response. Candidates realise the need to signal the purpose of their comparison early in the essay, and to check their own writing for accuracy of communication.

In this session, it was encouraging to see more responses to Prose questions than Poetry. Candidates should have plenty of practice in responding comparatively to both genres. Prose passages offer plenty of opportunity for close reading of the writers' techniques and concerns. Centres are teaching the analytical language appropriate to narrative alongside that of poetry, and good answers are addressing narrative viewpoint, sentence structure, the purpose of description and the dynamics of dialogue in prose writing. The structure of prose extracts deserves careful consideration, even if it is less deliberate and explicit than the structure of verse.

Candidates should have something to say about the texts as a whole before beginning to analyse their details. In particular, it is important to have a context for comparison, and the stem question and bullet points, as well as the choice of texts themselves, should help candidates to construct an effective opening paragraph and essay plan. Quality of personal response and interpretation (AO4) is just as important as close reading of language and effects (AO3), while the contextual element is integral to AO2, the deeper understanding of the texts. Thus it helps candidates to identify a context and explore it comparatively from the beginning of their response.

Previous Examiner reports have emphasised that comparison is the essential purpose of the task and the best responses sustain critical comparison throughout the essay. This provides evidence of well-developed personal response and interpretation. Contexts could be determined by the subject matter, relationships, literary traditions or social issues addressed: they are not historical. In this session, it was clear that candidates are much clearer now about how to integrate context within their arguments and how to sustain a consistently comparative approach which nevertheless gives enough space to each text to consider what makes them distinctive and individual, as well as to explore similarities.

Candidates are also aware that a small but significant number of discrete marks are available for the quality of written communication. Most wrote with considerable accuracy and at least general control of meaning.

Accuracy should not be at the expense of range of vocabulary and structures: a wide range and effective, even memorable expression are essential requirements for a mark at the highest level.

There was no very weak work in this session and candidates were credited for their achievement across the range of Literature Assessment Objectives.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

The focus suggested for comparison of *The Owl* by Edward Thomas and *The Peace of Wild Things* by Wendell Berry was the ways in which both poets memorably convey the impact the natural world has on them. Both are weary and both describe the nocturnal sounds of nature. While Berry finds the 'peace of wild things' gives a relief to his despair and human fears for the future, Thomas, writing earlier but perhaps less Romantically, is stirred by the 'melancholy cry' of the owl from his own warmth and comfort to identify more closely with those 'unable to rejoice' and without a comfortable resting place, with no choice but to lay 'under the stars'. His sympathy for the 'soldiers and poor' is as strong as his interest in the voice of nature. While the impact of the natural world in both poems is to recall the poets from their more self-centred concerns, Berry finds peace, grace and freedom while Thomas is reminded of those excluded from such comforts and of the pain and sadness of the cold night.

Good candidates quickly realised that the two poems differ in tone, and explored the deepening melancholy of Thomas in contrast to the ways Berry finds relief from his sufferings and discontent. They all saw that both poets portray solace and tranquillity although for different purposes of contrast. Some picked up on the soldier reference in Thomas, and some the quasi-religious nature worship of Berry.

In Thomas, the contrasts between cold and heat were brought out: rest at the inn, the 'sweetest thing', proving 'proof/Against the North wind'. The triplet of 'food, fire, and rest' was set against 'hungry, cold, and tired'. The owl's cry breaks down this barrier between security and the wild world outside, and Thomas's skilful use of enjambment was noticed as embodying the way the cry connects the poet with those who have not 'escaped'. The melancholy nature of the bird's cry was seen as emphasised by the two negatives 'no merry note, nor cause of merriment' and the alliteration, which mimics that sadness rather than expressing exuberance. Sibilance – 'my repose, /Salted and sobered' – further stresses the bitter tones of the birdsong and makes it speak for the voiceless.

In Berry, good candidates again noticed the effectiveness of enjambment in making links and connections, in this case embodying the poet's journey down to the lake. In contrast to Thomas, Berry does not discover the 'forethought of grief' but rather 'still water' and silent presences. The 'day-blind stars' are waiting for the light, and some found a melancholy note here, reflecting the poet's own despair and restlessness, but they still noted the feeling of freedom and 'grace'. One or two make an interesting comparison with those lying under stars in Thomas, whose stars bring no such contented relief.

Most candidates were able to comment the structure and language choices of both poets and how these supported the contrasting tones and emotions of each poem. The contrasts offered opportunities to contrast the contexts for observations about the place of human beings in the natural world. Some considered whether nature is really as benevolent as poetic tradition usually suggests. All were able to engage with the evocation of rest and peace by each poet, as well as the restlessness of each speaker, one provoked by the owl's cry and the other by more immediate human concerns. Some were interested in the contrast between Thomas's depiction of 'inside' with Berry's outdoors, noticing that Thomas's version of the outdoor life is far less romantic, and perhaps more realistic. Others were interested in the pain and the presence of fears for the future evident in both poems and the search for peace, more elusive in Thomas's case. Some attributed this to evidence of a wartime setting. There was a suggestion that the 'wild things' in Berry are not perhaps as peaceful as he would like to think.

One candidate linked the stars in both poems to the idea of different notions of fate. These different notions of fate were then connected to the contrasting hopes and fates of the poets. The originality of insights and thinking about the poems once they are set alongside one another continues to be a pleasure for those reading the work of candidates for this paper.

Question 2

Candidates clearly engaged with the more domestic settings of the prose passages, from *Lady's Dream* by Tobias Wolff and *Amongst Women* by John McGahern. The oppression of women within marriage by their husbands' overt or implicitly hostile behaviour provided a clear context for comparison. The question helpfully highlighted 'the nature of relationships' and some included in their responses the relationship of Moran to his intimidated children, as well as the silenced wives in both passages. Good answers focused on how the writers' choice of narrative voice gave an opportunity for expression of the women's suppressed thoughts. Strong responses also considered the structure of escalating tensions in each. Some thought that Lady had literally gone or walked out at the end of Extract A, contrasting this with the cowed and silent exit of Rose in Extract B. Certainly, the texts provide interesting interpretations of silence and passive resistance.

More straightforward answers focused on differences between the husbands: Robert is never 'mean' by intention, but often in practice. Moran's aggression is alluded to ('the violence Moran had turned on her') and demonstrated through verbal assault in the passage ('deep reserve', 'demanded', 'acidly' and finally 'a fit of hatred') so that Rose feels as if she 'had been struck without warning'. Candidates compared the selfishness of both men, while agreeing that the hostility of Moran seemed more calculated and threatening. Emotional coldness was seen as a trait common to both men, even if it is disguised as consideration in the case of Robert. One or two felt the endings of the passages were optimistic and that both women had decided to leave. Those more sensitive to the way oppression is expressed in both extracts were more pessimistic about any such happy resolution.

Candidates enjoyed Lady's hyperbolic and vigorous expression of her own suppressed hatred of Robert's obsessions and of his desire to make her a partner in his compulsive and repetitive life. Many saw that Lady is 'suffocating' in a number of different metaphorical ways, and consequently read the details of description as symbolic of the many ways she is confined and given no breathing space by the 'silent staring man'. Some compared this silence with the 'silence and deadness' which falls on Moran's girls when he enters the room. Perceptive responses noted that the chattering Rose is reduced to a similar silence by Moran's verbal battering at the end of the passage. In both passages, silence seems intended to reduce women to submission, although Lady seems to be less easily cowed.

Stronger responses noted that, although both narratives are written in the third person, they clearly offer the perspective of the women, and voice their secret thoughts. Some were very aware that this purposely puts the reader on the side of the women, and determines where our sympathies lie in both relationships. Candidates contrasted the disrespectful humour of Lady with Rose's naivety: she only seems to realise the extent of Moran's morose hostility towards the end of the passage. Even when she does, her emotions are of 'fear, insecurity, love', whereas it is evident that any love on Lady's part is long dead, despite Robert's constant attempts at endearments. The domestic details which convey tension and awkwardness were carefully noted by most candidates.

Some candidates felt that Robert's 'considerate' nature was a sign that he still has genuine affection for Lady, and contrasted this with the 'brusque' words and body language of Moran. Some felt his self-righteousness neatness and politeness was even more oppressive, and a form of obsessive-compulsive or passive aggressive behaviour. The feeling was that both writers make the reader quite depressed about the nature of marital relationships and concerned for the effect on the female partner. The traditional patriarchal social context of both extracts was compared, with many details suggesting that this is more evident in passage B. Details of ways in which both men assert their dominance were particularly noted. Some expressed their disgust at such displays of power, whether overt or more sly. One candidate noted that while Robert bought the vacuum cleaner bags, it was Lady who was expected to change them. A few responses explored an atmosphere of suppressed violence in both passages, and the suggestion that either woman might at some point break out or fight back, although this never quite happens: 'both men seem to scare their wives into doing things for them.'

The repetitive patterns of expression in the first passage were seen by some as mirroring Robert's repetitive patterns of behaviour which Lady finds so irritating, while the abruptness of movement as well as expression on Moran's part gives the reader the feeling of threat and menace felt by those around him. Both women were read by some candidates as submissively trapped within patterns, and struggling, in Rose's case, even to recognise this, let alone to escape from them. One candidate perceptively commented that Lady 'is permitted no dialogue, implicating (sic) that she is being held captive in her own mind'. She is, however, much more free in her thoughts, and this emerges through the more informal nature of the narrative voice. There were different interpretations of 'Lady's gone': some read this as a literal departure and others as the 'absence of her own mind, or perhaps her patience and sanity'. Hence candidates differed over whether she

breaks free of repetitive cycles of behaviour or remains trapped in them. They agreed that any progression in the characterisation of Rose in Extract B was for the worse, as she becomes a 'silent and empty vessel'.

While all candidates seemed to engage with the sexual politics of both passages, only a few looked closely at differences of structure and style. Examiners felt that there is scope for teachers preparing learners to give them more tools for the analysis of prose, so that candidates can look further beyond what the writing expresses and analyse how it works. A good response commented on how the reader becomes a spectator 'just like Lady and Rose become to their own minds'. It is especially interesting to read comparisons of different ways in which writers convey the inner feelings of their protagonists. Some, for instance contrasted the different effects of the choices of past and present tense in the passages; others commented on the more unorthodox narration of Passage A as itself a commentary on a dysfunctional relationship.

Contemporary interests were reflected in the sensitivity of all candidates to the abusive nature of such relationships, and candidates expressed their own independence with vehemence and confidence. Candidates alert to status games were especially good at finding supporting detail for a contextual reading of these marriages. They noticed that even if Robert initially seems boring rather than boorish, words such as 'lethal', 'nightmares' and 'kill' betray the violence of Lady's repulsion. This was compared with the more overt atmosphere of 'fear', 'resentment' and 'violence' in Passage B. Candidates struggled more to see that Rose's repression in this passage comes from the fact that, in contrast to Lady, she is still in love with her husband. The bullet point referencing 'tension' allowed structural consideration of how strong suppressed emotions are built up, and of the extent to which they are resolved by the ways in which the passages close.

Candidates liked the darker hints in both passages that worse is to come. Candidates sometimes comment on the depressing or pessimistic nature of many of the literary texts they study, but these do provide them with good opportunities for analysis and expression, and indeed they often seem more confident at exploring darker and unhappy relationships than expressions of joy and pleasure.

It was good to see interest in the prose passages, and candidates prepared to extend the repertoire of their unseen literary criticism. Most took the opportunity the time allocated to this paper gave them to produce some very good and well-argued responses.