

# Examiners' Report Summer 2008

GCE

## GCE English Literature (8180/9180)

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## 6391/01: Drama and Poetry

### General

Once again this year, examiners reported a very pleasing standard of work in this unit. The candidates were mostly well prepared for the examination with a sound knowledge of the texts, and, at the top end, an impressively sophisticated ability to interpret and analyse. However, it was also clear that a minority of candidates did not put their knowledge and preparation to best use, revealing a lack of confident examination technique. This was exemplified in such aspects as poor time organisation, lack of signposting of the argument, uncertain paragraphing and an inability to balance the demands of the specific and detailed against those of the general overview.

There remains a tendency on the part of many candidates to ignore the more ambitious and complex demands of the questions, reducing responses to character studies or often rather simplistic statements of the ‘meaning’ of poems, ignoring the teasing ambiguity so often at the centre of the poetic experience.

Some candidates still include much contextual material in a unit which does not assess A05. Generic understanding *is* part of this assessment, but needs to be carefully integrated. Critical quotation is not essential and in any case too often does not play an effective part in developing the candidates’ argument.

### BEHN: The Rover

Only a few candidates attempted questions on this text, although there were a some excellent responses which explored both the dramatic structure and technique and the themes, usually from broadly feminist critical assumptions.

#### Q1(a)

There were a some excellent answers to this question. A number of perceptive answers were able to relate the ending of the play most effectively to thematic issues in the play as a whole. Candidates often argued effectively in response to the key phrases ‘reconciliation’ and ‘unconvincing resolution’, exploring generic issues and Behn’s dramatic technique with considerable sophistication.

#### Q1(b)

This was the more popular question. Most candidates engaged thoughtfully with the title and text, showing clear understanding of the nature of Behn’s satire. Few candidates simply agreed with the title’s assertion, most exploring the uncomfortable nature of the comedy. A popular choice of passage was Blunt’s humiliation, but several candidates found more fruitful material in the attempted rapes, one observing of Willmore and Angelica, ‘Thus Behn again encourages acceptance of an unlikely, exciting circumstance before manipulating the audience into a feeling of guilt for ever having empathised with such cruelty.’ Another took as a powerful starting point the concept that ‘Comedy and accident in her plays became the vehicle for Behn to express a judgement upon an oppressive society.’

### FRIEL: Translations

The popularity of this text continues and most examiners reported on an impressive range of responses, most of which remained focused on at least part of the question. However, as ever, there are those candidates who could not resist providing a wealth of contextual

material, much of which proved to be irrelevant and none of which is part of the assessment of this unit.

### **Q2(a)**

There were a lot of elements to this question - threat, uncertainty, optimism, reconciliation - but candidates were not required to deal with all of them equally. Some focused exclusively on threat which was obvious to all in Lancey's language and manner in the prescribed scene, with a number of candidates also making telling structural points about Sarah's dumbness and Owen's translation being inversions of key points earlier in the play. Some candidates were too carried away with the prescribed scene and spent far too long on detailed analysis of it, failing as a result to consider other parts of the play. The 'uncertainty' was also covered: Sarah's failure of speech, Hugh's future, Jimmy's complete immersion in fantasy and the potato blight, but this last sometimes lured candidates into peripheral historical context. Maire and Hugh provided opportunities for discussion of 'uncertainty', which were elaborated by confident candidates with reference to the whole play. The Donnelly twins embodied the impossibility of reconciliation for many, though attempts to see optimism in Maire's conviction that Yolland would return were rather less convincing.

### **Q2(b)**

Some candidates had difficulty with the concept of 'control', failing to explore a range of material and focusing instead on Manus's handicap and Hugh's drunkenness. More successful treatments saw lack of control pervading the play at personal, political and cultural levels: Manus's attempt to structure his life between the competing claims of father and 'fiancee'; the powerlessness of the community to resist the wrath of Lancey; the sense of unstoppable forces, embodied in the English army, but also more broadly, through the historical developments which were erasing the Gaelic language and culture. Candidates often struggled, however, to focus on the idea of community at the centre of the dramatic world of the play. The higher band candidates placed their interpretations in the context of Friel's stagecraft and dramatic technique, although there were others who were determined to write their 'language essay' regardless of the question.

## **CHURCHILL: Top Girls**

There were fewer responses to this text this year. However, examiners reported that on the whole the responses offered a range of engaged and interesting ideas.

### **Q3(a)**

There were a few very well expressed and detailed answers which explored the political/social themes of the play as well as the feminist perspective. There were others who developed a rather simplistic interpretation of 'happy' and 'bleak' without acknowledging the complicated nature of fulfilment and frustration as presented by Churchill. A few answers used the opening of the play, although as usual candidates seemed rather frightened of Act 1. A number of responses used feminist readings to define ways on which the presentation of Marlene in particular could be explored, although there is a tendency on the part of less confident candidates simply to use the word 'feminism' and hope for the best. There was some awareness of dramatic devices, but the concentration on character tended to limit this in many cases.

### **Q3(b)**

There were a number of responses which showed real engagement with the text. Most agreed with the premise in the statement that Marlene was neither a victim nor a heroine or decided that she was both, being heroic in Act 1 but more victim-like in Act 3. A number of candidates considered her 'a villain' in her relations with other women, specifically in Act 2 but also in her treatment of her sister, daughter and mother. These answers declared

that Joyce was the heroine and Angie the victim. Some more probing responses decided that although she was neither, she herself *felt* she was both and yet other responses thought she was simply a victim of her own driven personality. One candidate commented that ‘the cost of Marlene’s sacrifices is paid by Joyce’. Others explored the way in which we see her from ‘shifting perspectives’ and placed the play in the context of political postmodernism.

### **WILLIAMS: A Streetcar Named Desire**

As is usual, this was the most popular question in Section A. Almost all examiners mentioned the high quality of the responses and particularly the way they reflected a real understanding of Williams’ dramatic technique.

#### **Q4(a)**

It was evident that candidates felt confident in demonstrating Williams’ dramatic methods and there was, as usual, a lot of good, detailed exploration of both verbal and non-verbal techniques of dramatic presentation. It was also evident that students who answered this question had revised *Mitch* and had a very secure knowledge of his role in the play. There was, therefore, a number of straight character studies which, while often capable, lacked the focus and argument prompted by the question itself. A discriminator was often the degree to which responses explored the impact of Williams’ stagecraft and their understanding of the complexity of Mitch’s relationship with Blanche. While more pedestrian treatments saw it as simply a ‘romance that didn’t work out’, other candidates recognised a far more bleak picture of an attraction of convenience based on loneliness, loss and desperation, and saw the two characters with as many similarities as differences. Some, indeed, saw Mitch as an essential part of that spectrum of masculinity running through the play from Stanley to Allan. Others explored the moral ambiguity of both characters and how Mitch’s flaws equalled Blanche’s in many respects, and that, in intention, he is morally no better in Scene 9 than Stanley. The best responses were always aware of the character’s contribution to the overall dramatic variety of the play, including, of course, as a source of humour. As one candidate wrote, ‘...his chat-up line “How much do you weigh, Blanche?” makes the audience both cringe and laugh, and also feel pity as the vast gulf between the two characters is exposed.’ A few also tackled the emotive power of the potential relationship between Mitch and Blanche, taking the implication of ‘Williams...never allows’ to be the audience’s desire to believe in a positive ending.

#### **Q4(b)**

This was the more popular question. All candidates were comfortable with the notion that characters can display both strengths and weaknesses; the discriminating factors were the levels of complexity recognised and the substantiating detail provided. A small number of candidates considered only Blanche in response to this title; Stanley, Stella and Mitch all provided plenty of valid material. Stanley was probably the most successful: there were interesting examinations of the contrast between the icon of masculinity and the husband distraught at even the temporary absence of his wife. Blanche, too, was successfully discussed, though surprisingly few addressed her final exit as an action potentially at least of some strength and dignity. Stella provided interesting discussion when the candidates got beyond her sexuality. The candidate who wrote that ‘Stella’s choice of Stanley over Blanche is not weak, but an act of self-sacrificing strength, because her duty now is not to her husband or sister but to her baby’ showed the variety and complexity of argument that was possible in response to this question. A surprising number, though, ignored the phrase, ‘even those who at first appear to be strong’; those who did embrace this concept gave a more confident shape to their arguments. The definition of ‘strong’, however, was sometimes questionable. Several

candidates argued successfully that Blanche's strength is shown in her willingness to enter into conflict with Stanley, and that his reaction is proof of her ability to expose his vulnerability.

### **STOPPARD: Professional Foul**

There were even fewer answers on this text this summer than usual and comments are therefore necessarily brief.

#### **Q5(a)**

A clear discriminator was the degree to which responses provided a simple character study of Anderson or explored the key prompts of 'cold and detached' which directed candidates to explore dramatic presentation.

#### **Q5(b)**

Of the few answers to this question, a number responded in a clear and developed way, exploring the ideas of 'individual freedom' with perception. Less effectively covered was the impact of the comedy in the play.

### **Edexcel Poetry Anthology (Section One: Post-1770)**

This was the most popular question in the paper. Examiners commented on the range of responses, from the engaged and perceptive to those answers which right from the start were suffering from uncertain focus and poor choice of material.

#### **Q6(a)**

Insecurity and loss were concepts familiar to all. Of the named poems, Arnold was by far the more confidently handled, with many detailed discussions of the crisis of faith and the way it is embodied in the structure and imagery of the poem. Rather fewer candidates made more than a perfunctory stab at analysing the apocalyptic brutality of Yeats, however. Local effects were at times considered intelligently ('...the fact that the desert birds "reel" takes us back to the "gyre" at the beginning of the poem'), but overall the intellectual density of the poem defeated many. Successful companion poems included 'All the Things You Are Not Yet' (parental insecurity), 'Prayer Before Birth' (loss of innocence) and 'God's Grandeur' (loss of faith, often accompanying Arnold). Other successful choices were 'Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night', 'I Am', 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and 'Easter Monday'. Candidates who considered Rossetti, E.B. Browning and Burns faced a rather uphill task of fitting the poem to the terms of the question.

The most common discriminator was the extent to which candidates considered 'the powerful emotional impact' and analysed closely the relationship between technique and impact. A number of examiners commented on the way that all but the most confident candidates did themselves no service by writing about more than three poems.

#### **Q6(b)**

The candidates displayed, on the whole, a mature recognition of the implications of the statement. The 'bad points' tended, in the nature of things, to predominate: Clare's despair, Blake's controlled rage and MacNeice's prescient and fearful foetus all attracted thorough discussion. It was good to read some searching examinations of the vision of peace at the end of Clare's poem; too often, candidates rubberstamp it as a death wish, missing the complexity of the image. E.B. Browning and Burns provided a positive counterbalance on a number of occasions. 'Easter Monday' was sensitively shown to evoke loss, stoicism and a celebration of how personal tastes and friendships make us human. Rossetti and Dylan Thomas often appeared in tandem, sometimes rather as if a prepared essay on loss was being shoehorned into this one on humanity. But there were few poems that didn't feature in at least one response, and interesting combinations were frequently

thrown up, e.g. Blake's 'London' with Walcott's 'Oddjob, a Bull Terrier'. Many candidates compared their poems, although this is not a requirement. Many confident responses did this extremely well but the less certain candidates often simply flitted from one poem to the other with little clarity of argument.

### **BETJEMAN: The Best of Betjeman**

It is pleasing to report that Betjeman continues to inspire some closely argued and engaged responses.

#### **Q7(a)**

Candidates clearly continue to enjoy Betjeman and the importance of time and death in his work was widely recognised. 'On a Portrait of a Deaf Man' generally encouraged detailed discussion, with many candidates identifying and examining the tension between the details of his life and the macabre vision of his rotting body. Alert candidates also looked closely at 'melancholy', seeing how it springs out of love in the poem. 'Sun and Fun' received less attention, although candidates responded well to the air of seedy decay in the poem. 'Devonshire Street W.1' and 'Death of King George V' were popular alternative choices, but those who used 'Slough' and 'Executive' found it harder to develop an appropriate argument. Only a few responses analysed the contrast between the lyrical rhyme scheme and rhythm and the harsh content and language in some of these poems. Most neglected this aspect of Betjeman's poetry, addressing at most the use of rhyme to emphasise contrast in 'On a Portrait of a Deaf Man'. Overall, there was a clear focus on how Betjeman conveys feelings of loss, although the contrast between serious themes and Betjeman's apparent lightness of style was rarely explored in any detail.

#### **Q7(b)**

This was the less popular question. Responses were generally detailed and showed clear knowledge and understanding. Some candidates did tend to look at too many poems, thereby limiting their opportunities for analysis. There were a number of examples where candidates had adopted the 'list' approach, working their way through a number of different aspects of life. Others, however, approached the poems effectively through themes such as class, as in '*A Subaltern's Love-song*'.

### **KEATS: Selected Poems**

Keats's poetry attracts a small but enthusiastic group of centres. Essays were generally knowledgeable with a wide range of textual support.

#### **Q8(a)**

Most responses gave a strong sense of critical awareness with an ability to analyse Keats' language and its effects which was often most impressive. The given poem and the feelings of sadness, loss and joy embodied in it were of course very familiar to candidates, although they were generally more at home with the melancholy side of the question. As usual, the best treatments balanced conceptual grasp with exemplifying detail. Companion poems included 'Ode to a Nightingale', 'When I have fears that I may cease to be' and 'La belle dame sans merci'. Some candidates enriched the usual comments on the passage of time with consideration of Keats' thoughts on poetic inspiration and literary posterity. A few candidates addressed the tension within 'To Autumn' and compared it effectively with 'Ode on Melancholy'. Some responses continue to be tempted to include largely unhelpful contextual material.

### **Q8(b)**

This question attracted some thoughtful and focused treatments. 'La belle dame sans merci' was a popular and successful choice, with appreciative discussions of the disconcerting and bewildering effect of its fractured narrative. There were plenty of discussions of 'Ode to a Nightingale' too, and some interesting explorations of the conclusion of 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', and, indeed, the poem as a whole. In general, candidates had been well prepared for this question, felt confident in exploring the ambiguities at the centre of Keats's work and chose material with care.

### **The Penguin Book of American Verse**

There were some very effective responses to this minority interest text. The key to successful answers was often the selection of appropriate material.

### **Q9(a)**

Students who opted for this question generally gave the impression of having studied the American poets with real enthusiasm. A number of responses touched on the ways in which some of the work expressed its anger and bitterness not only in its content, but in its boldly iconoclastic approach to form and language, for example in the strident, edgy rhythms of Plath or the subversion of male traditions in a range of female poets. In fact, the range of poets confidently used in answering this question offered a clear indication of the candidates' genuine engagement with the anthology. Understandably Plath figured in a significant number of essays frequently accompanied by analyses of Alta, Rich, Ginsberg and Sanchez. Some outstanding answers included insightful explorations of Whitman and his influence on Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti. Overall, one often had the distinct impression that many of these candidates had found sympathetically angry voices speaking both to and for them.

### **Q9(b)**

This question was also approached with maturity and enthusiasm. Most noticeable was the sheer variety of poets the candidates were able, justifiably, to apply to the question: Sanchez, Plath, Rich, Sexton, Corso, Ginsberg, Creeley, Bukowski, Lowell, Hughes, Cummings, Ransom, Eliot, Pound, Williams, Frost, Dickinson and Whitman were all discussed. Dickinson was very popular, a tribute to teachers' willingness to engage with a challenging poet whose 'mind moved in mysterious ways', as one candidate admitted. There were detailed analyses of even such minimalist pieces as Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro' and Williams' 'The Red Wheelbarrow'. As one examiner wrote: 'Perhaps the most impressive feature was that no candidate saw the material as simply English poetry which happened to be written a long way away: there was a real sense of a body of poems originating from and reflecting a unique geography, history and culture.'

### **CLARKE: Letter from a Far Country (from Collected Poems)**

There were few answers to these questions and Clarke clearly remains a minority interest. In general, examiners found the responses engaged and detailed.

### **Q10(a)**

Most candidates understood the idea of identity well especially the role of women, although they were less certain of the idea of 'welshness'. Many were, however, rather less confident about 'doubts and uncertainties'. Many responses found relevant material in the named poem, and other poems used were 'Miracle on St David's Day' and 'Sunday'.

**Q10(b)**

There were some interesting responses to this question and a good range of the poems was used. The 'details of ordinary life' were however often ignored. The most popular poems were 'Jac Codi Baw', 'Heron at Port Talbot', 'Sunday' and 'Scything'. The best responses dealt well with the idea of the unexpected in 'Miracle on St. David's Day' and the ways in which certain words signal the unexpected early in the poem - such as in the line 'I am reading poetry to the insane'. Another response dealt very well with 'Jac Codi Baw', exploring the use of imagery, for instance the extension of the metaphor of blood for dust in the first section and again at the end of the second section. Overall, the 'matter of factness' is what struck many of the more successful responses in Clarke's reflections of everyday life, which makes the unexpected and poetic gleaned from these situations all the more engaging for them as readers and critics. They consistently remarked upon the understated yet compelling force of her work.



## 6392/01: Pre 1900 Prose

### General Comments

The best responses define and respond to the key words in the question, and keep them central throughout their essay; they also produce and sustain an integrated argument which does not ignore or sideline part of the question. It is important that candidates are aware that characters do not have a life of their own. Many weaker answers seemed oblivious to the author's role and wrote as if the characters control what happens. In general, candidates need to be aware that all questions are looking for acknowledgement of the connection between the author and the text. Words such as "creates", "explores", "presents" and "reveals" are there in the questions to encourage candidates to respond to the writer at work. Weaker candidates do not always engage with this.

### Q1(a)

The key concept of this question, "inevitable conflict", was not fully addressed by all candidates in sufficient depth. Lower band answers tended to see characters as representing "modern" or "traditional" ways of life rather simplistically without sufficient reference to context or authorial concerns. Many answers were also limited by a narrative, or sequential structure and were also content to stay within a contextualised and exemplified account of modernity and tradition in the novel, without really moving onto an active focus on Hardy's explicit literary presence and questioning. "Tradition" posed a problem for a number of candidates: it is the Heath; it's located on the Heath; it's the heathfolk drinking and gambling... There's Susan and her needle and the anti-school faction - but that's about it. Among weaker responses there were many incidences of "this was not approved of by the Victorians", and as much as ever of the "all-controlling Heath".

Candidates chose a variety of means of exploring modern ideas and attitudes and traditional ways of life through either descriptions of character and behaviour or through their ambitions and work they carry out. Many candidates provided excellent comparisons between Eustacia and Thomasin; one approach was to contrast Hardy's characterisation of Eustacia and Thomasin, seeing them as representing the conflict between the Victorian embodiment of woman as the 'angel of the house' and the modern free spirit. Weaker candidates merely described Eustacia and identified her views and ambitions. Mrs Yeobright was sometimes made use of in a developed and helpful way. There was much discussion about Clym and his ambitions to educate the heathfolk and some managed to balance this with Venn whose role as reddenman was becoming obsolete even to the community on the heath. Many candidates lapsed into discussion of the heath and personified it in terms of who it allowed to live and who died in terms of whether they tried to 'help' it and keep tradition or who tried to leave or bring change.

Overall, the best responses selected pertinent textual, presentational, biographical and historical material, focusing it around a sustained and balanced argument that may have been organised around particular characters or settings, but always had the key terms of the question in mind.

### Q1(b)

The weakest responses simply listed characters and offered their opinions on whether or not they deserved punishment: "You never hear Thomasin moaning about life, she just gets on with things." Better answers explored character features in more depth, for example comparing Clym's stoicism and Eustacia's desperate struggle with her fate and so on. Many of the higher band answers used the question to launch an exploration of Hardy's experiment with the tragic genre, drawing precisely on Hardy's linking, patterning and foreshadowing within a larger framework of explicitly (although interestingly complicated) classical tragedy. They were clearly in command of the vocabulary of genre and the detail

of the text. Others looked at Hardy's philosophical exploration, arguing that because Eustacia is so clearly associated with paganism, and so evidently disassociated with the church, it is inevitable that she is ruled by fate. Still others made clear arguments about how they saw Hardy's purpose: "The moral message remains unclear as even though Eustacia dies and this could be perceived as 'punishment', she gains a tragic stature in death causing readers to sympathise with her."

It was pleasing to see some candidates situating Thomasina, using terms such as the pastoral, with a sophistication which has grown to match that usually accorded to Eustacia. Imagery of light ('luminous', 'mirror'), colours and references to birds were well-used and sometimes supported by the implicit presence of Patmore's Angel of the House. The best answers used Hardy's allusions to figures of Fate to structure the response and analyse the role of the language of environment in controlling and fating the characters, such as the 'harsh, metallic colours' of the heath which surround the elderly Mrs Yeobright. Some candidates, however, seemed simply lacking in the generic vocabulary required to address the question in a sophisticated way, and were lacking in any alternative routes apart from description and summary.

Lower band candidates tended to divide their essays into a character-based "punished" section and a "rewarded" one. Some made comments on Hardy's intentions in this, but most stayed with story-telling and some extremely tortuous re-workings of the fate/chance/coincidence/Heath conundrum. Better responses worked at the question in the context of Hardy's "masterplan" where "coincidences push the plot towards tragedy"; where "the characters are all caged birds - what is important is the size of the cage"; and where there is a "pitiless chain of events" - all coldly crafted by the author. Some very good responses considered issues of "aspiration" and "personality" and related these to "punishability" or "reward" in Hardy's dispensatory calculations.

Lower band responses tended to examine how characters were rewarded and punished without exploring how this related to the key concerns of the text. "Chance" was a concept that not all candidates were able to fully engage with, which limited their responses to a listing of outcomes. Higher band answers pursued this more rigorously and more ably analysed how the novel related to Hardy's intentions as a writer.

## Q2a)

The best responses examined the roles and significance - in narrative or symbolic terms - of their chosen characters, relating this relevantly to Shelley's background and convictions and drawing out differences and parallels between the women. There was some discussion about what feminine "passivity" might mean to Shelley herself: was Shelley saying that they all needed to toughen up and leave the sewing and poetry alone - or that their male counterparts/"superiors" should learn from their gentle and self-sacrificing ways? Several saw Safie as lively and assertive, and Justine as having a tragic pathos in her passivity. Mid-higher range candidates linked the destruction of the female monster to Victor's role as begetter. Few interrogated or defined what "moral standards" might mean, assuming commonsense good/bad distinctions. Weaker candidates ran through the characters in descriptive or simplistic ways with little or no usage of text, or drifted off into what an imaginary "feminist" critic might say. Stronger candidates saw Margaret and, to some extent Elizabeth, as providing the moral norm, and representing society as a whole. The best responses argued that Shelley shows dignity and strength in feminine "passivity".

There was also some informed debate on Shelley's differentiation of female characters in terms of class, background, culture etc. Other responses saw the "domestic goddess/earth angel/arts and crafts-woman" syndrome as proof that they are indeed "mere devices". Some focused on the fact that all three narrators were male and that Shelley was not advocating female subjection but demonstrating that only women upheld the fabric of society. Some candidates argued that Shelley successfully challenged stereotypes by

demonstrating the importance of the passive virtues. Many responses noted that Shelley was deliberately contrasting the adventurous male with the domestic female. Good answers pointed out that female passivity was often a feature of the gothic genre, citing lines such as, “The saintly soul of Elizabeth shone like a shrine-dedicated lamp in our peaceful home.” One interesting analysis went on to say that Shelley was in fact defying Gothic generic convention in that the hero is not allowed to save the damsel in distress - that is, Shelley doesn’t allow Victor to save his newlywed. Some candidates argued that Sofie, although the least passive, showed the archetypal qualities of the Gothic heroine, having courage and zeal, rejecting the harem etc. On the other hand, there was a persistent suggestion that women were passive in the early 19th century in that they had no literary voice. Of course, wider literary-historical knowledge is not required at this level, but it seems a strange fact to have been taught - especially in light of the presence of Jane Austen, Maria Edgeworth and female Gothic novelists such as Ann Radcliffe. In fact, the developing genre of the novel through the 18th and early 19th centuries was the precise moment when women began to acquire a literary presence, both as readers and writers.

### Q2b)

The main focus on this question was the comparison between the spoilt upbringing of Victor and his abandonment of his “child”/creation. There was some confusion in the interpretation of the terms of the question in that some described “nature” as natural surroundings rather than innate behaviour or instinct. Lower band answers lapsed into identification of behaviour that was motivated either through nature or nurture. Many merely sought to blame Victor for the events in the novel and the deaths of all of his loved ones.

“Nature” and “nurture” could be difficult terms for some candidates to conceptualise. Lower band answers also tended to predominantly focus a little too heavily on “character” rather than examining all three areas of “character, setting and plot”. There was also a tendency for candidates to make surface comments without relating them specifically to the question. For example many compared Frankenstein to Prometheus without explaining exactly why it was relevant. Higher band answers engaged with the question in a more probing fashion, with interesting comparisons being made between Frankenstein and his monster’s “upbringing”.

Stronger responses drew upon Hobbes, Milton, Locke, Galvani, Rousseau and even Hegel to explore the nature/nurture distinction. Mid-higher range candidates also identified essential features of Romanticism and linked them well to the landscape and vertiginous events of the novel. Some of the best of these followed through the nature/nurture linkage - and also drew in the “role” played by “natural surroundings” as part of the culturing/cultivating experience that is fundamental to “nurture”. There were, though, some “standalone” responses which trekked with Frankenstein and his Creature from forest to ice-floe in relentless detail. Again there was the unresolved “issue” of Victor’s lovely, loving upbringing producing the “real Monster” - why should that be?

Higher band candidates used character, setting and plot as prompts to focus their definitions of nature and nurture, and to structure their argument through the successive components of the novel. Another approach was to define and explore the moral registers of nature and nurture, then turning to how those were presented in the novel, or intertwined: “nature as a place of solace or nurture”. As the categories of nature and nurture were helpfully “blurred” in the view of some candidates, so were the “monstrous” and “human”. This blurring was then developed and reinforced with reference to the systematic parallelism of the plot.

### 3a)

Higher band responses engaged with the question and were able to distinguish between the construct of the novel and Austen's authorial voice. There were some responses based on a reformulation of the question to read "Mr Knightley is presented as a detached character..."; "Mr Knightley is portrayed as being impartial, somehow disconnected....". This kind of "detachment" gives him great powers of observation and an objective overview which more "attached" characters don't have. It is also sufficiently adaptable a characteristic that it can be modified so that he can appear at or indeed even host social events..., so this misreading/understanding did produce some well-argued, evidence-based responses. Others however picked it up and then threw it away - Mr Knightley and his part in Emma's development featured prominently in many of these. Better essays still rather struggled with the term as applied to Austen's presentation of Knightley in the sense of somehow implying that there is little need to go looking for critical proof when it's obvious that Knightley is the embodiment of Austen's "own ideas and moral values". Again, some good essays were worked up from this rather flimsy starting point. Better still though were essays which had some grasp of Austen's narrative technique and wit, and knew something about her. One of the best said: "At certain times, Austen removes herself from Knightley's persona and becomes a surveyor of his actions rather than an approver".

Several answers maintained that Knightley embodies not Austen's views but those of the time. Weaker to mid-range responses saw Knightley as the perfect gentleman and representative of Austen, and neglected the other characters. Weaker answers here simply saw this as an opportunity to write their character study of Mr Knightley, the "voice of reason"; "educator of Emma" and so on. The best answers dealt with the idea of authorial detachment as suggested in the question. Those answers showed a genuine appreciation of Austen as a crafter of prose. For instance, some candidates pointed out that Austen sets up John Knightley as a foil to his brother, allowing Emma regularly to pick up on his rudeness and pointing out how he is not as well-mannered as his brother and so on. Other responses pointed out that Austen uses Knightley to foreshadow plot events to come later, for example Jane and Frank's engagement.

Overall, most candidates considered the idea of detachment to some extent, often in a fairly superficial way, picking out Knightley's condemnation of Emma's quip at Miss Bates. Many concentrated on whether he reflected Austen's ideas or moral values without investigating what those "ideas" or "moral values" might have been.

All candidates displayed thorough engagement with the novel, according to their own varying abilities: some enjoyed the plot, the love story, the authorial voice, the contextual influences, grappling with the given statement. As one enthusiastic candidate put it: "Jane Austen has been compared to 'the authorial equivalent of crack-cocaine', as her novels are so addictive." One very good answer examined how Emma and Mr Knightley might be argued to represent sentimentality and rationality respectively.

### Q3b)

Candidates' unwillingness or inability to engage with Austen's techniques is a noticeable feature of responses to all questions on Emma. The best of these responses were articulate, clearly argued and perceptive, agreeing with the question (if at all) only in part. The question gave plenty of scope for weighing up characters' fortunes and approaching the manners/fulfilment tension from a variety of angles. Most respondents saw individual happiness as Austen's overriding concern despite the highly conventional nature of Highbury. Weaker-mid-range candidates struggled to clarify their argument but managed to succeed through persistent consideration of the question. A weak few candidates took 'social conventions' to mean gatherings such as the ball or picnic but most candidates used this question as an opportunity to look at the social context of the novel and engaged with the question arguing, for example, that Harriet's experience is used to

show that social convention can lead to the delaying of individual fulfilment and so on. The best responses showed Austen developing a story that ended both conventionally and happily. But very few candidates were able to analyse Austen's narratorial voice, her irony and directness amid polite talk.

Lower band answers had a tendency to focus too heavily on individual pairings and their respective "happiness". Higher band responses moved beyond this to consider idea of "rational" marriage and "social conventions" and how the marriages and events within the novel contributed, or not, to upholding a stable society. Some candidates convincingly argued through the characterisation of Emma, Harriet and Jane that the upholding of social conventions was inevitable in order to attain eventual happiness in such a society as Highbury, but lower band answers relied on descriptions of the characters and an account of what they did or what happened to them. Many lower-band answers had difficulty in maintaining a simultaneous focus on characters and how they deal with conventions, and Austen's deliberate presence, shaping and manipulation. More often, the latter was entirely absent. It is worth noting that some candidates also had difficulties with their own - and by extension, the novel's - tone and register: "Harriet lusts after Robert Martin".

There was much less reference generally this year to "pre-1900" as a historical frame, although one answer to this question referred to social conventions "in pre-1990". There were also a few slightly strange historical parallels: "the Coles are like Wayne Rooney in the way they are frowned upon for being in trade and trying to be upper class at the same time". Despite the incongruity, this formulation at least is oddly illuminating. Finally, some candidates helpfully pointed out that social conventions "build happiness" by securing status.

#### Q4a)

Most candidates were very familiar with head/heart, fact/fancy oppositions and were able to cite relevant material to illustrate their points. There was much assertion about Dickens's attitudes, a little less on his values; as always, what distinguished the better candidates was their ability to engage with such terms as "powerfully" and to demonstrate how Dickens had used characters to reflect his views.

There was, however, a problem of proportion in some responses here. There is an argument for centring the whole essay on Gradgrind, and some responses did exactly that successfully because they were able to spin off much more from his role, characterisation and significance than a start-to-finish character study/sketch. Lower band responses obviously enjoyed the security of staying with the character named in the question, and most could match what they wrote of Gradgrind to what they knew about Dickens's "own ideas and moral values". But if Gradgrind was discussed as a reformed character, it helped if the unreformed Bounderby, Sleary or Harthouse featured in the response too. There were several Fact v Fancy responses which hardly seemed to get out of the school-room.

Candidates on the whole responded well to this question and produced engaged, motivated considerations of the novel. The clear distinction of 'head' and 'heart' plausibly fitted the range of characters and opened up discussion of Dickens's views on education and industrialization. Context was usually done well with most showing a sound grasp of Utilitarianism and the strongest drawing on Bentham and Mill, and seeing "sowing, reaping and garnering" as agricultural, pre-industrial and organic.

Only a few candidates failed to fully respond to this question and candidates were mainly able to demonstrate what they knew, use the characters who fitted their lines of argument, bring many contextual factors into play. Weaker responses tended to offer a character study of Gradgrind, without looking at Dickens's own values. The best answers explored Dickens's handling of the "reap what ye shall sow" metaphor and looked at the

novel's language and structure with this in mind. The text was very present in the better answers to this question, allowing the context of ideas to be linked to presentational techniques and authorial tone. The textual presentation of Rachael in particular, "irradiated" or saintly, was helpful in aligning her with and enriching the notion of the "heart". There were some other very perceptive and focused observations: one candidate picked out when Bounderby "taps his hat like a tambourine", recalled the parallel with Victorian street dancers then observed that "Bounderby has become the clown in Dickens's pantomime". Groups and patterns of colour and imagery were used well to support development of the contrast between head and heart. This ranges from Gradgrind's "square" appearance set against Sissy's "lustrous" dark hair, to the religious satire of Coketown contrasted with the "more subtle religious imagery of the Circus" which "gently enforces Dickens's view that the 'wisdom of the heart' is essential".

There was a problem with some responses which immediately reformulated the question as one of "fact" versus "fancy" and produced a generalised essay on this, without working through "head", "heart" or their "powerful" revelation. "Fact" and "fancy" may be the end-point of that argument, but some focusing and shaping around what the question actually refers to is also required.

#### Q4b)

More successful responses eschewed closed pairs of characters for a series of character contrasts which built and structured the argument of their essays. The use of "caricature" as a focused literary term also helped here. The best answers immediately recognised "right and wrong" as a reference to a conceptualised morality, and Dickens's "use" and "contrast" as a deliberate and carefully constructed didacticism. Particularly impressive was a focus on Gradgrind's moral loneliness at the end (which moved from pairs of characters to the conflicts within them). In general, the best answers moved from individual pairs of characters to the idea of pairing and contrasts in Dickens's novelistic art. A repeated presentational focus on Dickens's imagery supported this well, for example Bitzer's "pale" light opposed to Sissy's "lustrous" darkness. Another candidate added productively to this that she was "a symbol of moral goodness" and went on to say that "Sissy's simple moral authority is contrasted with Harthouse's weak sophistication"

There was a tendency for some answers to draw in "wisdom of the heart" and "head", perhaps from Q4a (which then becomes another "contrasting pair" linked to examples of characters). When integrated well, this was not necessarily a problem. In some answers, however, it effectively replaced, or obscured, the focus on "right and wrong".

Most candidates chose pairings which contrasted well and represented the concepts of "right" and "wrong". Higher band answers were then able to relate these concepts to systems and organisations with a clear understanding of Dickens's authorial purpose. Best responses engaged with the novel as a literary construct and many looked, for example, at Leavis's description of the novel as a "moral fable" and used this idea to explore various pairs of characters in the novel and their representations of right and wrong. Weak responses tended to describe as many pairs of characters as they could in the time allowed. Determining what were the 'questions of right and wrong' proved difficult for a number of candidates. Some wrote about the industrial and social inequities of Coketown (using Stephen and Rachel as examples) but were then not sure what to compare this with. Others used characters to illustrate the horrors of utilitarianism but were not sure what the alternative was. Many based their argument around the proposition: fact wrong, fancy right. There were strange pairings of characters, with some candidates insisting that Coketown was a character because of the descriptions of the town. The most popular pairings were Sissy and Bitzer, Mr Bounderby and Stephen Blackpool, Gradgrind and Sleary. One character who figured as being a "must-have" in the essay was Sissy, whose significance, not just as a part of a particular response but as fundamental to any real

understanding of the “message” of the novel, was reiterated by candidate after candidate.

Gradgrind/Bounderby pairings produced some very sensitive appraisals of the former, the best of which linked the reformability and innate decency of Gradgrind to some sense that a reformability of the “system” may be in Dickens’s mind.

Some character descriptions were so embedded in narrative, usually about fact and fancy, that the examiner had to work hard to work out if there were any implied pairings. A few essays didn’t quite seem to get the “contrasting” part of the question and others didn’t get the “pairs” bit. So there would be three or four unlinked character sketches and not much else. The majority though very clearly enjoyed this question, even if a number were not getting beyond the re-telling stage.

#### Q5a)

Not surprisingly most candidates concentrated on Catherine’s relationship with Morris and her ultimate rejection of him. The more perceptive essays, however, also considered the role of Dr Sloper, arguing that he too had a moral sense, if a somewhat cruel and unyielding one, and that he was as much responsible for Morris’s failure as, without his opposition, Morris would have succeeded in his ambitions.

Higher band responses engaged with the concept of “defeat” and were able to question whether anyone did “win” at the close of the novel. The best answers regarded Morris as only ‘ostensibly’ a successful character or found other “defeats” than the obvious one. Candidates enjoyed the incremental power of Catherine’s refusal of Morris. The best answers explored James’s authorial intent and acknowledged that issues of “defeat” and of “superior moral sense” were not black and white, but reflected James’s ironic detachment. They also found a multiplicity of textually-specified superficialities, in architecture, appearance, behaviour and learning. Several also pointed to Morris’s self-consciously fictive presentation, as a “knight in a poem”. another form of surface attraction. Sometimes, however, this focus on surfaces was at the expense of a contextual scrutiny of “moral sense”.

Lower band candidates failed to define what was understood by “a superior moral sense”. The weakest answers had trouble treating characters as constructs and simply offered a character description of Morris along with their opinions as to whether or not he got what he deserved: they illustrated how Morris was unscrupulous but largely ignored the “superior moral sense”. While there doesn’t appear to be a Morris Townsend fan-club yet, some responses seemed to indicate that “defeat” is something which a character like Morris would bounce back up from in time. This “reading” doesn’t quite fit the “bald chap” image at the end of the book, but the line taken in such responses, is that Catherine’s “victory” can’t be such a great one, because he’ll carry on, and she’s a bit sad anyway.

Responses tended to attempt to demonstrate “superior moral sense” through a particular character with varying degrees of success. Those selecting Sloper had a difficult time in deciding whether he was in fact a moral character because of the way he treated Catherine and this often led to the candidate losing sight of the question. Other responses got tied up in deciding whether it could indeed be said that Morris was defeated due to the fact that Catherine didn’t appear to win anything. This of course was debatable and depended on whether the candidate was able to offer a secure feminist reading. Higher band answers got to grips with the concept of morality in context.

### Q5b)

Candidates in the main rose to the challenge of this question, engaging fully with the sense of emotional repression that the question raises. Many candidates pointed out how James's use of the omniscient narrator allows us to see both the interior and exterior lives of the characters and consequently see how much they hold back in public. Good candidates accessed AO3 by exploring, for example, James's use of settings to examine the topic:

“Even in the building of Doctor Sloper's house there seems to be a core room which holds strong emotions and thoughts cut off from social influence - the study is where, it can be argued, Catherine matures most as that is where she is told she won't get a farthing of her father's money...”

Or, commentating on the character of Mrs Montgomery: “her neat, tidy, frilly house is in direct contrast to her stirred emotions when questioned about Maurice”.

Candidates engaged in discussion of external appearance in connection with wealth, most often identifying Catherine's red dress. Sloper again was often condemned for his poor treatment of his daughter and to what extent he reveals his disappointment in her. Lower band answers again lapsed into narrative and went on to identify characters who were superficial or who were essentially suffering or insecure. Higher band answers focussed on surroundings which often inevitably led to discussion of context - New York as an emerging society, for example. The presentation of wealth was the major focus of responses and consideration of whether characters were happy or not. There was consideration of women's roles and survival in a patriarchal society but few were able to do this without lapsing into naïve statements. Higher band answers were led by the indicator “James creates” and engaged in consideration of techniques as well as context here.

There were some very assured responses which analysed the society James portrays and its values and considered his purpose in so doing. Such answers often showed an impressively detailed knowledge of the text and were able to substantiate their arguments by close reference and quotation. A number of answers centred on Catherine's “insecurity and suffering” and Morris's “external appearance” but without offering very much on the other side of the equation. Some also mentioned Dr Sloper's “suffering” because of his not recovering from the death of his wife and also because of his dissatisfaction with his daughter.

Appearance was also referred to in this question as a matter of role: Catherine was the “tragic romantic heroine”, with James opening up questions as to how far she will play that part. One candidate nicely pointed out the novel's obsessive focus on eyes and their appearance, as a way in which the surface, and surface values, are presented.

Catherine was noted as a victim, but those who argued that Dr Sloper was suffering and insecure had a tough task. Lower band responses to this question tended to rely too heavily on characterisation and did not engage sufficiently with James's technique. Apart from the ritual use of the phrase ‘James creates’ to show focus on the question and a sense that this is a literary construct, there was very little attention paid by lower band candidates to technique or argument as opposed to a simpler response to character behaviour. Higher band answers tended to examine the details of Jamesian society in more depth, and were able to comment on the concept of “concealment” beneath a social façade. An interesting response used the context of the family confronting the development of New York growing through immigration, Morris being seen as an example of the “outsider”.

## 6393/01: Shakespeare in Context

### General Comments

Most centres approached the coursework efficiently and responsibly, setting appropriate tasks. Problems arose where the tasks set were not enabling for candidates: the main reason why candidates under-achieve is that they are disadvantaged by the task set. Setting the same task for all candidates is often not the best choice and may restrict their opportunity to demonstrate their own independent judgement. Allowing candidates to write their own questions is also usually not a very helpful approach, since appropriate question-setting is quite a sophisticated skill.

Tasks which focus on possible different responses of a contemporary and a modern audience are very popular. However, sweeping generalisations about different audiences do tend to be unconvincing, particularly when they disregard generic conventions. Such comments need to be detailed and grounded in the text.

### Administration

Centres are reminded that they should include the top and bottom candidates if these are not already included in the sample. They must also substitute another candidate's folder if one of the sample folders is from an absent candidate. These were the problems which caused most communication with the centre, delaying the start of the moderation process.

- Not all work was signed by the candidate and the teacher, but this is a requirement.
- Some centres' folders were assembled in plastic sleeves, and some were in plastic folders, which made the work difficult to read. A few candidates' work was sent as loose sheets, generally unnumbered. Please attach the sheets by staples or treasury tags.
- Word counts, candidate numbers and the AO boxes were incomplete in a number of instances.
- The mark on the coursework itself did not always correspond with the mark entered on the Optems.
- A significant minority of centres sent two copies of the Optems to the moderator who requires only the yellow copy.
- Centres sometimes send both sets of coursework to the same moderator. Please check to ensure that the work is sent to the right recipient.

It was encouraging to see that a number of centres had made an effort to address the recommendations in their last centre reports though in other cases the recommendations had been ignored, and exactly the same problems and issues presented themselves as in previous sessions. Reports give information to the centres about potential or actual problems, and offer constructive advice for future submissions.

### Word Counts

Some centres continued to submit over lengthy answers and teachers acknowledged it often in their summative comments. Moderators commented that they received centres where all essays were well over 2000 words, with the longest being almost 5000 words long. One centre submitted work with an average length of 3000 words. Some centres imposed arbitrary penalties for over-long work; some ignored the issue altogether; others justified it on the general grounds of the excellence of the work. It can be pointed out that

almost invariably these excessively long essays become meandering and less than purposeful, and judicious editing would enhance the quality.

### **Task setting**

Question setting is crucial in the coursework units. Many centres set tasks which clearly addressed AO5i, but there were some centres which disregarded this assessment objective entirely. They set questions on characters for the most part. Tasks also do all need to provide opportunities for response to AO3, and moderators commented that several centres lost sight of this in setting questions and assessing their candidates. There seemed also to be misunderstanding of what this objective actually refers to. It was clear from annotations that a number of teachers were crediting quotation from the text as AO3. But AO3 assesses 'detailed understanding of the ways in which writers' choices of form, structure and language shape meanings'. Some essays had little or no attempted analysis of 'writers' choices'.

### **Issues relating to assessment**

#### **Annotation**

It has often been stated in these reports that the moderation process depends in part on centres providing sufficient annotation to support the mark that they have awarded. A few essays had ticks only and a brief comment on the Front Sheet but there should be a clear summative comment, addressed to the moderator and not the candidate, which includes evaluation of the work clearly related to the Assessment Objectives, but not simply repeating the wording of the AOs. In addition, marginal notes are very helpful, although once again, they should go beyond simply stating the number of the AO. Annotations which simply read "AO1" or "AO4" were again a feature on some centres' marking. Most centres *do* provide clear and helpful support for their marks, but a number of moderators pointed out that there are sometimes inconsistencies between markers in the same centres; it would be very helpful if all internal moderation was guided by the same policy.

It is important that centres conduct careful internal moderation of the folders where more than one member of staff is involved in their assessment. The front cover 'teacher-examiner' box should be used to document the internal moderation process, particularly when marks have been changed on the front cover without any justification offered of why this has happened.

There were some scripts which showed little or no sign of having been marked by the teacher making it difficult to determine why a particular mark had been given. However, some centres had clearly and usefully annotated their students' scripts, had made helpful summative comments and showed clear evidence of internal moderation. Much the most helpful practice for the external moderation process is where teachers had annotated candidates' essays thoroughly and evaluatively, supported by helpful summative or front-cover comments in which candidates' achievement had been specifically linked to target AOs.

## Assessment Objectives

The descriptors of all the assessment objectives make reference at the higher band levels to the need to relate to the text, to be supported by the text or to make connections with the text. Some centres had ignored this in the attempt to ensure that they had met the requirements of AO5. This was not the majority of centres; indeed the best centres were those which made the text central to the study.

AO5i Context was addressed by the vast majority of centres, but with a tendency to rely on questions about ‘the Elizabethan audience’ compared to ‘a modern audience’ which does tend to elicit sweeping and uninformed general assertions from less able candidates. One moderator commented that propositions such as ‘Beatrice and Benedick appear to be outside the time of *Much Ado about Nothing* and more acceptable to a modern audience’ worked much better than less precise references to modern and contemporary audiences. This particular statement also avoids the possibility of candidates eliding the play’s time and setting with those of its writing, something which is very commonly done. Tasks such as ‘Discuss loyalty in *The Winter’s Tale*’, ‘Women in *Hamlet*,’, or ‘Love in *Antony and Cleopatra*’ did not explicitly encourage candidates to target this AO.

AO1. Writing ranged from the sophisticated to the unclear and disjointed. In some cases the greatest weakness lay in the lack of textual reference which made the essay read like notes.

AO2i. Most candidates showed awareness of dealing with a play, only a minority treated the characters as real people. A number of candidates still set out verse as prose. This shows a lack of awareness of both genre and form. Candidates displayed relatively little overt recognition of the generic conventions of comedy.

AO3 all too often became confused with the fact that a quotation had been used, rather than the language effects being explored. Sometimes marginal comment stated ‘good analysis’ when a candidate had merely quoted, or made a brief and undeveloped claim about effects. The majority of candidates commented on the effects of language but did not always explore or analyse it. There were comments on structure, but these could usefully have been more sustained and developed. Candidates’ awareness of form and genre did not always convince, especially when verse was quoted as prose.

AO4 was extensively addressed with centres asking their students to refer to critical viewpoints; they did not also consider that at the higher levels AO4 requires analytical ability and some centres did not recognise that, confusing the presentation of critical viewpoints with analysis and understanding of the text. Centres are reminded that AO4 requires ‘independent’ judgements, with the candidate’s own interpretation being set against those of others, and an awareness that there are many ways of interpreting texts. Some candidates merely quoted critics, others discussed their views and gave their own opinions. A few relied heavily on critics at the expense of other AOs especially AO5i. In a number of centres candidates showed they knew more about the critics than the text itself.

## Critical Sources

The use of film versions was occasionally a problem, in that they became substitutes for the text, thus making AO3 even more restricted. Directors’ choices are certainly valid as interpretations, and there is very likely to be some contextual significance in the approach taken, but the text itself does need to remain central. What Branagh or Olivier emphasise in productions and performances needs to be grounded in the text, and set against the candidate’s own interpretation.

Critical comments were often used as the main part of a task, but this was not always to the advantage of the candidates who were sometimes presented with gnomic utterances which understandably they could sometimes make very little of: 'reducing Ophelia to Hamlet's anima is to reduce her to a metaphor of male experience' is an example of this.

### **Bibliographies**

Most candidates now provide bibliographies although they are sometimes rather inadequate in scope and detail. References to websites should be clear and detailed. A number of candidates still seem to think that a few notes indicating rather vaguely websites which they have researched satisfies the requirements of a bibliography. It does not. Please encourage candidates to acknowledge all their sources, both in the body of the essay, and in the bibliography. Occasionally, endnotes masqueraded as bibliographies, and foot-notes were used at times to smuggle in extra words. However, there were a substantial number of centres where candidates had produced scholarly, well-sourced and well-presented folders.

## 6393/02: Shakespeare in Context

### General

There was much evidence of good teaching, good time management, well-planned answers and an appropriate critical voice adopted by the vast majority of candidates.

Many candidates clearly expressed personal opinions and engaged with the text but seemed to stop short of examining the material in detail. A number of answers included well-rehearsed ideas, which were somewhat haphazardly assembled.

Cogent responses in the higher bands were generally engaging and contextually thoughtful. The biggest challenge in this paper is balancing the assessment objectives and including them all. The lower band scripts often treated context by providing sections of material, which was not then integrated into the argument or examined in any detail; a common problem on this paper.

A number of candidates did not pay enough attention to A03 in their answers, but those who engaged with Hamlet's soliloquies, for example, or the differences between prose and verse in *Much Ado About Nothing* were more successful. Despite the fact that A05 is double weighted many competent and knowledgeable candidates disadvantaged themselves by not analysing literary and linguistic features in more detail.

In the majority of responses, quotation was used effectively to support the argument of the essay; however, there were candidates who were not successful at utilising these quotations in an analytical and explorative way. Whilst it is good that candidates can make appropriate textual references, these textual references are not enough in themselves. Candidates need to comment in more detail on the quotations used in order to show a genuine understanding of the text. Quotation should be used to help drive the argument and demonstrate an understanding of the writer's choices of form, structure and language.

Many pupils disadvantaged themselves by over-planning. In one response the plan was so extensive it almost read like a first draft of the essay to follow.

The majority of candidates appeared well taught and to have prepared well for the examination.

### Henry V

#### Q1(a)

Many responses made successful parallels between Henry and the ideals expounded in Machiavelli's 'The Prince'. Many also discussed successfully the dichotomies of Elizabeth's reign and the context of sixteenth century warfare. Candidates could have explored the notion of 'a King *needs to be*' in the question more explicitly. In addition to this, the question asks candidates if they agree with the statement in the question; not all candidates were successful presenting their own personal response.

There was evidence that 'brilliant speaker' was rather taken for granted than analysed stylistically, but sometimes the conflating of the two elements of the question had the contrary effect: that the 'calculating politician' was described rather than analysed. Indeed, on a small sample, the difficulty was less in the question, which invited an even handed approach, than in the tendency of candidates to part-narrate, part-comment on the history at the expense of Shakespeare's dramatic skills and language. Some candidates ignored the possibility of exploring Henry's calculating nature in the extract chosen which limited their response.

More successful responses evaluated the effect of various speeches and theatrical devices on the audience as well as the characters in the play.

### **Q1(b)**

Many essays dealt with Shakespeare's ambiguous presentation of war in the play. Candidates explored the fact that this ambiguity has led to the play being interpreted differently on stage and on screen as a consequence of the political context of the time. Some answers considered the role of the chorus in the presentation of war successfully, analysing this dramatic device.

An interesting range of characters were used as illustration of differing attitudes to war. There was some imbalance in responses: 'presentation of war' was not quite so well understood.

A number of candidates relied on detailed contextual knowledge - contemporary history and politics and, occasionally, current affairs from today, which had little relevance to the question - but there was some impressive awareness of Shakespeare's other history plays and his source, Holinshed. It was how this material was used that differentiated the candidates. Answers were instinctively equivocal, allowing for agreement with 'not a pro-war or an anti-war play', however more could have been made of the second part and whether the equivocal stance was equivalent to 'going-to-war' or not, and if so, how.

There were examples of informal language such as 'going into meltdown' 'got the vibe' and 'well into it' appearing in discussions of the text, which is unsuitable tone for a literary study. Some responses relied too heavily on narrative.

Higher band answers explored the language of the play, such as the effect of Henry's taunts at Harfleur to show negative aspects of war and also assessed possible audience response both in Shakespeare's time and now, to the depiction of war.

The words 'dramatic' and 'attitudes' were sometimes ignored which limited exploration of language and other devices.

## **Anthony and Cleopatra**

### **Q2(a)**

There were some excellent responses exploring Shakespeare's presentation of the tragic relationship between Antony and Cleopatra in considerable detail, though few actively challenged or proved the difference in the question's statement having some difficulty with the notion of 'who rules the world'. Very few candidates examined what 'the world' in the question signified with a number of answers just exploring the themes of Rome versus Egypt. Higher band answers tackled the differences between how a modern and a contemporary audience saw the play, examining relevant contextual factors. The most successful answers looked at the structure of the play with some assessing the significance of Caesar having the closing words.

The term 'modern audience' led some candidates to generalise about today's love of soaps, intrigues surrounding famous people and damaging, political scandals, which was not a successful route to take, losing sight of the play. Overall, candidates had good knowledge of the play and were able to integrate quotations into the body of argument.

### **Q2(b)**

Differing interpretations of the question led to a few candidates ignoring Cleopatra's suicide as it was not the "Roman value of suicide" [i.e. a Roman person committing

suicide]. Elsewhere, relevant, focused arguments were often hard to find as there was much focus on honour and masculinity, and some candidates were too preoccupied with Plutarch or other Shakespeare tragic heroes.

Many candidates tended to see suicide in plain terms either as a Roman, victorious action (sometimes missing the Christian, prescriptive views of Shakespeare's time) or a defeatist reaction, given Caesar's victory. Answers did not always see the ambivalence of suicide - with some notable exceptions that emphasised Antony's posthumous recognition and its compensation for the ineffectiveness of his own immolation - or the ways in which Cleopatra redefines it. The latter, when discussed, played successfully on Cleopatra's victory over Caesar by this ironic method and interpreted Caesar's eulogy as vindication; others, contrastingly, saw Caesar as offering empty words but retaining power, thus reminding Shakespeare's audience of the need for pragmatism. Focus on Eros, Enobarbus and Charmian and Iras occasionally added shade and nuance to answers too.

Higher band answers looked at the idea of 'wholly supports' and 'world of the play' in relation to Elizabethan values and culture. However, there were many answers that simply listed each suicide in turn with a few simplistic remarks about whether it could be seen as a defeat or victory. A couple of the best higher band answers analysed Shakespeare's portrayal of Antony as a tragic figure in relation to the question.

## **The Winter's Tale**

### **Q3(a)**

Most candidates did deal with the character development of Leontes but didn't always grasp the 'complex nature' of guilt and redemption exemplified by his character. Useful contrasts were made with Polixenes and Autolycus and some exploration was made of the final scene's ambiguities. Higher band responses considered Leontes' 'journey' and Paulina's treatment of him.

More was possible on language (AO3) but some of Paulina's words were well analysed in some answers. Many answers ignored 'complex nature' unless it was to say that forgiveness is not guaranteed nor redemption necessary in some cases (Autolycus). Some answers were merely a description of characters that embodied guilt and redemption with little consideration of the structure of the play or the language or function of characters such as Paulina. Some higher band responses considered the Christian idea of redemption and how it was interpreted by Shakespeare in the world of the play.

The best answers looked to address how the two key concepts merged in the characterisation - whereas the majority addressed 'guilt' first and then 'redemption'. Virtually all candidates completely accepted the statement in the question - very few challenged it.

### **Q3(b)**

There were some good, intelligent discussions, looking at the role of relevant characters such as Leontes, Perdita and Florizel, whilst others, less successfully, chose to examine characters who did not fit the comment such as the old Shepherd and Camillo. There was evidence of good knowledge sometimes effectively revealed in quotation from across the play. Exploration of language occurred less frequently, however. The association of country with youth and nature was a feature of one thoughtful essay, showing a preparedness to move beyond character-based answers. A number of candidates ignored 'strongly emphasises' which limited the scope of answers.

The majority of students fell into the trap of delineating examples of "sinful maturity" in the first 3 acts, and "natural youth" in the last two. The higher band responses challenged

this, developing interesting readings where there is ambiguity. A number of answers were did not directly answer the question but included detailed notes that had presumably been taught, which is not a successful approach.

Some higher band candidates were good at commenting on how Shakespeare structured his play in a way that made the juxtaposition of sinful maturity and natural youth more apparent.

### **Much Ado About Nothing**

#### **Q4(a)**

There were some very good answers to this question with many candidates comparing and contrasting the female characters with a consideration of the culture of the time. Higher band responses looked at the genre of the play, particularly in relation to its ending and the fates of Hero and Beatrice and how modern and Shakespearean audiences would view it. A number of responses challenged the statement, suggesting that Beatrice in fact conveyed that women had a more powerful role than was generally accepted. Better answers looked closely at the given scene and the patriarchal values of Messina as well as at the susceptibility of such a tightly traditional system to disguise, deception and trickery.

There were several responses which did not get beyond the one-dimensional view of Shakespeare simply presenting women as downtrodden: one very good candidate challenged the statement by exploring how the audience's sympathies are with the women because of the insipid view of masculinity. A number of candidates simply attempted to find as many examples to prove the statement as they could find. Some answers were too narrative and didn't consider how Shakespeare 'dramatically reveals' his portrayal of women, merely discussing the female characters in terms of what they do and say.

#### **Q4(b)**

Higher band candidates explored what they felt was meant by the key terms in the question. For less successful answers definitions of 'behaviour' and/or 'society' were bypassed in favour of implied relevance of examined examples.

The word "comic" was not quite so well understood from the Shakespearian perspective or in terms of genre. Higher band candidates were able to include irony, wit and puns. The comedy of Dogberry's role and his malapropisms was explored and some candidates responded to the comedy produced in the asides during the gulling scenes, (though detailed references to the National Theatre production or the Stratford performance of Beatrice eavesdropping upside down on a swing were less relevant). Many answers followed the pattern of benevolent versus malevolent deception, but often lost sight of the actual question.

Answers in general ranged widely through the play to explore human behaviour, society and comedy. These did tend towards giving narrative-based answers, however, not all candidates tackling the breadth of response in such a way as to challenge the question. Lower band answers simply related each deception in turn with no consideration of their functions whilst higher band answers moved beyond characterising each deception as 'good' or 'bad' making pertinent comments about the superficiality of upper class Elizabethan society, as seen through the mirror of Messina, and its preoccupation with honour and status.

## Hamlet

Hamlet, by far the most popular text, inspired some excellent answers as well as a few that suggested very little understanding of the text. This text, more than any of the others, drew responses to questions set in previous years. It is to be stressed how important it is that candidates answer the question in front of them. 5b especially was not fully understood as many students responded to this with simple character studies, or ignored the second part of the question, so that many potentially good answers were not well balanced.

### Q5(a)

Candidates used the set scene successfully in their answer with the majority exploring the image of Denmark as a prison. Many candidates considered the freedoms of various other characters. However, higher band responses dealt with Hamlet's freedom. There was exploration of freedom as being both a physical and a psychological entity.

Lower band responses tended to stick with the extract given, making general remarks about Hamlet feeling trapped. Higher band answers explored the soliloquies and Hamlet's different constraints as well as examining the 'roles' the characters are forced to play.

Incisive comment was made on Claudius' restricting practices as manipulator in chief, with some productive parallels made with Fortinbras. Responses were varied with Denmark's 'prison' qualities cited, or characters' willing sacrifice of freedom for political gain, or Hamlet's mental freedom contrasted with his obsessive confinement.

Some lower band responses included as many contextual references as possible without critically applying them to explore the question and the text.

### Q5(b)

There were some excellent answers to this question and answers reflected real engagement with the text. Many answers were good at dealing with both parts of this question: the political struggles and the internal conflict. Most explored Hamlet's psychological conflict using the soliloquies as a point of analysis.

There were a wide variety of interpretations of the term "conflict" which included Renaissance ideologies and the Old Order, Freudian theories as well as the Oedipus complex and Hamlet's attitudes to religion, death and corruption. The political struggles were not quite so well examined, but the two main areas were the war between Denmark and Norway, and Hamlet's claim to the throne (the Divine Right of Kings). One or two excellent responses analysed the structure of the play, focusing on Shakespeare's use of language in the uneasy opening of the play, and the secure tones at the end, proving that Hamlet's inner conflict was bound by the political conflict. Others argued that they were both inextricably linked.

Lower band answers tended to narrate the story or simply ignore the political aspect after a dismissive first paragraph. There were a number of unbalanced responses, with detailed evaluations of the soliloquies, at the expense of the actual question asked. A few wrote about the conflict that Hamlet had with others, rather than the conflict "within Hamlet himself".

There was much exploration of the context of religion and how this influenced the conflict within Hamlet. Unfortunately some candidates had a tendency to make sweeping generalised statements such as 'Religion was big in Shakespeare's day'. Many candidates referred to Hamlet as 'a Renaissance Man' without really fully demonstrating an understanding of this term.

## 6394/01: Modern Prose

### General Comments

Moderators once again reported the generally high standard of work this year. Indeed, a number of candidates wrote with exceptional sophistication, developing fluent arguments, full of mature insights. Many more explored the texts with a confident and perceptive approach.

It was encouraging to see that a number of centres had made an effort to address the recommendations in their last centre reports though in other cases the recommendations had been ignored, and exactly the same problems and issues presented themselves as in previous sessions. Reports give specific information to the centres about potential or actual problems, and offer constructive advice for future submissions

Moderators commented that a significant number of centres are now allowing candidates to choose their texts from a pool of appropriate novels and conduct more independent research as a result.

Tasks are, by and large, appropriate, although it is still true that the main reason why candidates under-achieve is that they are disadvantaged by the wording and/or demands of the question.

A few centres seem still to be unaware that A01 and A04 are double-weighted on this unit and A02ii is not assessed at all. In particular, centres are reminded once again that responses which do not establish a basic level of written accuracy are unlikely to be worthy of marks in the higher bands, regardless of content.

### Administration

Centres are reminded that they should include the top and bottom candidates if these are not already included in the sample. This year a number of centres failed to do so. They must also substitute another candidate's folder if one of the sample folders is from an absent candidate.

- Some centres' folders were assembled in plastic sleeves, and some were in plastic folders, which made the work difficult to read. A few candidates' work was sent as loose sheets, generally unnumbered. Please attach the sheets by staples or treasury tags.
- Word counts and candidate numbers were incomplete in a number of instances. It is also extremely important that the mark given on the OPTEMS and the record sheet is the same.
- A significant minority of centres sent two copies of the OPTEMS to the moderator who requires only the yellow copy.
- Centres sometimes send both sets of coursework to the same moderator. Please check to ensure that the work is sent to the right recipient.
- It is important that cover sheets are signed both by the teacher and the student.
- Please do not send coursework by Special or Recorded Delivery, as the package then requires a signature, and the arrival of the coursework can be delayed.
- It is a specification requirement that all work includes a bibliography (see below for further comment).

- Please do not place the authentication sheet so that it covers the candidate's record sheet.

### **Length**

Although most centres now encourage their candidates to keep to the required length there continue to be a number of instances where candidates write well over 4000 words. It perhaps needs to be pointed out again that very long essays nearly always penalise themselves through poorly structured argument and uncertain focus, and judicious editing would enhance the quality. This series there was also a number of very short essays; these too are unlikely to satisfy the assessment requirements at this level as arguments will be insufficiently developed.

### **Expression and accuracy**

It is still the case that poor proofreading sometimes lets down otherwise sound work. It cannot be over-stressed that there can be no excuses for candidates who fail to take sufficient pride in their work and allow ungrammatical expression, inappropriate phrasing, uncertain spelling and poor punctuation to undermine their response. It is also true that not all teacher annotation took account of such failures, often leading to an over-generous assessment of the work.

### **Annotation**

It has often been stated in these reports that the moderation process depends in part on centres providing sufficient annotation to support the mark that they have awarded. This requires a clear summative comment, addressed to the moderator and not the candidate, which includes evaluation of the work clearly related to the Assessment Objectives, but not simply repeating the wording of the AOs. In addition, marginal notes are very helpful, although once again, they should go beyond simply stating the number of the AO. Indeed, most centres *do* provide clear and helpful support for their marks, but a number of moderators pointed out once again that there are sometimes inconsistencies between markers in the same centres; it would be very helpful if all internal moderation was guided by the same policy.

### **Bibliographies**

Most candidates now provide bibliographies although they are sometimes rather inadequate in scope and detail. A number of candidates still seem to think that a few notes indicating - often rather vaguely - websites which they have researched, satisfies the requirements of a bibliography. It does not. A general feeling amongst moderators was that the more carefully annotated bibliographies were provided by those candidates who were clearly responding effectively in their essays to the demands of A04. Some centres now provide candidates with a 'class' bibliography. This may certainly provide a useful template and a starting point for the candidate's research, but it remains the purpose of coursework at this level that research should be independent.

### **Texts**

Certain texts continue to be very popular: *The Great Gatsby*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Go-Between*, *Howard's End*, *Alias Grace* and *Enduring Love*, for example. Popular this year also were *Mrs Dalloway*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Heart of Darkness* and *Never Let Me Go*.

### **Tasks and Assessment Objectives**

As mentioned above, the vast majority of centres set appropriate tasks which both challenged the candidate and provided a clear focus for argument and debate. As in previous years, moderators pointed out that tasks which set extremely wide parameters, or, alternatively, provided a focus which was very narrow, did not provide candidates with these essentials. Centres are also reminded that if they encourage candidates to set their

own questions (a difficult exercise in any case), they should ensure that they monitor their suggestions carefully. It is always worthwhile setting a range of tasks, rather than simply one, in order to encourage independent response and provide for differentiated responses.

In particular:

**A03:** It is important that candidates realise the importance of exploring the language and structure of their text as a literary construct, but tasks which focus directly on this aspect may not encourage a response which satisfies the double-weighted A04. It follows that tasks which include question words like ‘how ...’ need to balance this prompt carefully with encouragement to place the A04 demands centrally.

**A04:** Most centres recognised the importance of wording the task with this A0 in mind. It requires the answer to focus on ‘independent’ judgements, with the candidate’s own interpretation being set against those of others, and also an awareness that there are many ways of interpreting texts. The best responses do so and show a mature understanding of critical debate. An appropriate assertion followed by a question which asks candidates for their response (‘how far do you agree...?’) should provide candidates with a clear direction. It is worth emphasising again that the ‘other readers’ demand in A04 is not satisfactorily answered with a paragraph which conflates a range of critical responses in an often brief, quasi-historical overview. Candidates need to respond actively to the range of critical views they are accessing.

**A05:** While A05ii is assessed in this unit, tasks which encourage a particular focus on this A0 are likely to lead to excessive and often irrelevant inclusion of socio-historical information. This is a particular danger with texts such as Captain Corelli’s Mandolin.

### **Internal moderation and assessment**

Most centres had clearly carried out careful internal moderation which effectively supported the marks awarded. It was very helpful to see some evidence of dialogue between teachers, but quite often the evidence was only numerical, with one mark crossed out and another substituted. In a few cases, this led to confusion as final marks on the candidate mark sheet and the OPTEMS did not agree. Changes made to marks need to be explained and justified, and a box is provided for this purpose on the mark sheet.

Some issues of assessment are clearly still a matter for concern in a few centres. A number of moderators commented on the fact that internal assessment did not always take account of such matters as poor proofreading, inappropriate language choices, uncertain structure and focus and undigested critical comments. In general, there was sometimes a tendency to ignore the importance of the double-weighted A01.

As has been mentioned before, some centres show uncertainties over assessment at certain points in the mark range, most particularly at the top and bottom. Some candidates were treated rather harshly at the boundaries of Bands 2 and 3 and 4 and 5. In addition, at the top end, some candidates were disadvantaged for being ‘in the shadow’ of those awarded even higher marks and consequently penalised. This year it was also a particular concern that some centres awarded marks in Band 1 when the work was clearly towards the top end of Band 2.

### **Plagiarism**

As in previous years, there were some examples of coursework which centres suspected of being plagiarised. It is important that centres familiarise themselves with the procedures to be followed in these cases. Work should not be sent to the moderator but to Edexcel’s Compliance and Legal Services Department. It is not the job of the moderator to enter into this procedure in any way. Centres are also reminded that by signing the cover sheet they are effectively authenticating the work; it follows therefore that if the centre has any

doubts they should not sign or submit the work but refer it to the department above. It is also essential that centres never attempt to penalise candidates through the mark awarded.

## 6394/02: Modern Prose

As usual we had responses on all of the set texts, and on this occasion de Bernières was by far the most popular choice, Although Murdoch was the least favoured text by quite a large proportion, Atwood, Forster and Achebe were roughly equal in popularity. Now that nearly all scripts are marked online, we would like to reinforce the need for candidates to write clearly in dark blue or black ink so that the essays can be read with ease. Candidates benefited from close reading of the proposition and question which enables them to hit all of the required Assessment Objectives.

Assessment Objectives 1 and 4 are double-weighted. We are looking for a literary response and accurate English expression in order to see evidence of hitting AO1. Many questions which deal with character such as the very popular 1 (a) do not require character sketches; they are more likely to request analysis of how characters are presented. In order to hit AO4 candidates need to create an argument; narrative or description are unlikely to achieve this. Reference to named critics is not essential. Responding to the proposition in an informed personal response is as likely to be effective. In order to hit AO3 candidates need to be sensitive in their response to language and the conventions of the novel form. A surprising number of answers include references to their studied texts as plays. Awareness of contexts should be embedded in answers in order to hit AO5ii. Achieving a balance between these disparate demands is not easy; higher band answers do it with apparent ease, but they do so by attending to the precise wording of the question, but typical failings in lower band answers were either lack of consistency across the AOs or lack of evidence for one or more of them.

### Some features of lower band responses

We are glad to see that very few answers are to be found in band one. These are likely to be very short, to ignore the question, to show minimal knowledge of the text and have very little literary awareness.

We see many essays that start rather like this:

*In 'Captain' Corelli's Mandolin 'by Louis de Bernières ....*

This kind of stock response does not get the candidate very far. Stock general statements about the kind of text being studied that have little or nothing to do with the precise wording of the question are a similar waste of the candidate's and examiner's time. Another less than perfect approach is exemplified as follows:

*In chapter 22 Mandras behind the veil', Mandras is being treated by Pelagia who has seen him naked, this is very ironic because Pelagia is to see him naked after his marriage but rather due to the war she can see him naked.*

The repetition of a basic point, the indifferent expression and the descriptive manner suggest, correctly, that we are in Band 2. The hint of literary awareness in the reference to 'ironic' is not developed and in any case poorly expressed.

The same candidate makes a potentially good point which is not developed and again not perfectly expressed:

*During the treatment of Mandras, Pelagia is reminded of the story of Philoctetes. De Bernières parallels to the Greek mythology to emphasise on the pain and ugly look that Mandras is suffering.*

At this level we are disappointed at the level of inaccuracy of candidates' written English with misspellings of the names of authors and characters and confusion over similar seeming words such as 'emphasise/ empathise'. Some time spent re-reading before handing in might avoid the unfortunate:

*Helen and Leonard have a long and intimate conversation which leads to Helen falling pregnant.*

Or:

*Margaret is the spiritual air of Howards End.*

### **Some features of higher band responses**

We often see indicators that a candidate is going to be achieving highly early on if there is a clear focus on the topic:

*de Bernières...manages to convey a sense of scale and grand tragedy both through the sheer length of the narrative - stretching as it does from just before WW2 to the (then) present day - and through the drama in the fates of those involved.*

This candidate has immediately seized on some of the terms of the question and is already suggesting the beginnings of an argument. She brings matters to a satisfying conclusion:

*In the timescale covered, the language used and most of all in the remarkable events which befall the characters, 'Captain Corelli's Mandolin' successfully achieves a truly epic scale. The continued reference to Homeric legend makes clear that de Bernières's 'Captain Corelli's Mandolin' to be on a similar scale and consequence and the fates of his characters live up to this.*

In the following opening paragraph:

*...Mandras is initially portrayed as an Adonis-type figure. However, by the end of the novel, he is rejected by even his own mother, and his suicide is his own redemption. This seems to be the makings of a tragic figure, yet Mandras's decisions and naïvety which cause his change suggests perhaps that de Bernières presents him as less of a tragic figure and more of a naïve young boy.*

we can see a literary awareness, the beginnings of an argument and even the possibility of an overview. This is confirmed later on in this essay when the candidate points out the:

*...in the end it is only the dolphins, Mandras's true friends who accept him.*

This candidate has some sense of the tragic dimension in the portrayal of the character

*...as he realises that his greatest and most heroic act would be his death...*

The range of this answer is extended when the candidate goes on to make comparisons with Carlo's loss of Francesco and his experiences of the horrors of war:

*Carlo fails to change and loves someone he knows will never love him back, yet Mandras chooses to leave someone who loves him merely to prove and feel better about himself. Mandras seems insignificant in terms of tragedy in comparison.*

It is always enjoyable to see a candidate making a point clearly and concisely:

*In Chapter V there is a slightly oxymoronic sense of irony as Beethoven is described as being 'the most sublime noise'.*

Hitting AO1 in this way is not difficult.

A candidate in band 5 is likely to have a clear sense of narrative technique:

*... "The Bell" is constructed around the perspectives of three of her chief protagonists...as well the cool observations of her omniscient narrator.*

This candidate differentiated between what she perceived to be 'opaque' and 'transparent' characters:

*..our opinions of these 'opaque' characters are shaped by the perceptions of our 'transparent' characters...*

This is neatly brought to a conclusion after some detailed and thorough analysis of the novel in relation to the topic:

*In all therefore, the choice to have several 'transparent' characters within the novel does serve as a means of characterising the more 'opaque' characters through observations and personal opinions. However, Murdoch does not use these characters as infallible judges of character in the novel, instead she shows how their misjudgements and their own feelings have a bearing on the events in the novel. Therefore it is down to Murdoch's omniscient narrator to truly characterise both the 'transparent' and the 'opaque' characters, whilst the judgements of Michael, Toby and Dora serve primarily to illustrate their own choices as the novel progresses and the way in which several characters can appear in different lights.*

**de Bernières: Captain Corelli's Mandolin**

This is by far the most popular text for this paper.

#### **Q1 (a)**

This was the most popular question on the paper and much more popular than the (b) question. Almost without exception, everyone who answered on this topic enjoyed writing about Mandras and showed sound knowledge of his character. The differentiation was provided by factors such as the ability to range widely through the text, to discuss the implications of tragedy and to provide an argument in order to engage fully with the proposition. There were many ways of doing so and the Aristotelian concept of the 'fatal flaw' was just one. Whether or not Mandras was responsible for his own downfall or not was a valid focus. Higher band answers were aware of a range of political and cultural contexts as well as the varied ways in which the character was portrayed at different points in the novel. We noted, for example, analysis of the use of the narrative voice, stream of consciousness, mythological imagery, references to death and the 'chasm' as well as the range of language, some of it very crude. The use of key chapters such as 11, 28, 34 and 63 was often appropriate. Enduring the sufferings of war in a misguided quest for Pelagia, and Mandras's politicisation at the hands of Hector were also valid focuses. Some candidates made interesting and valid comparisons with Günter and Carlo as perhaps better candidates for tragic status.

#### **Q1(b)**

This was a far less popular option and depended on some kind of engagement with the concepts of 'epic' and 'fate'. This was occasionally, but not consistently, achieved through references to the Greek and Roman epics. Effective analysis occurred when candidates

dealt with the ways in which de Bernières embeds these references into the body of the novel. For some candidates the focus was largely on the ‘little people’ and hence a largely character based answer. Popular choices of character who provided good material for discussion were Corelli, Arsenios and Carlo.

#### **Atwood: *Alias Grace***

##### **Q2(a)**

This was quite a popular question and depended on the ability of candidates to engage with the implications of ‘moral and intellectual’. Candidates had little difficulty in dealing with the idea of ‘victory’ with clear accounts of what the fates of the two characters were at the end of the novel. Perceptive candidates observed the ambiguities surrounding the final quilting references and Grace’s continuing to lie as she constructs her new life. Many noted the ironies of the reversal of Grace and Simon’s circumstances. Good answers dealt effectively with the different narrative strategies employed, but at the lower end of the scale we found many narrative accounts of the relationship and at this level there was some uncertainty of the precise nature of Simon’s fate.

##### **Q2(b)**

This was almost as popular as the (a) question but generally rather less well done. There was usually some ability to deal with gender and class issues competently, although the idea of ‘authority’ was more elusive. It was not difficult to deal with ‘inequalities. The perception that women, including Grace herself, were often in control by virtue of their ability to manipulate men, was argued by a few. The clue to this aspect of the question is the reference to ‘Grace’s voice’. Hence it would be appropriate, and was found in more thorough answers, to deal with a range of authority figures with whom Grace came into contact covering a range of social classes from the prison warders to the professionals such as Bannerling, Verringer and the lawyer MacKenzie and her employer, the murder victim, Mr Kinnear. Our reader response to such characters may well vary according to whose viewpoint they are often presented from. Our manipulation by Atwood herself and the ways in which she employs a range of narrative techniques was proficiently done by some higher band candidates.

#### **Murdoch: *The Bell***

##### **Q3(a)**

This was the least popular question on the paper. Higher band answers tended to construct an argument based on the opposition between the natural and human worlds. Close references to the events of the chapter were linked to other appropriate incidents. The conflict at the meeting over different ways in which the community would work and obvious conflicts between characters were dealt with adequately but there was surprisingly little on the attempted and actual suicides of the twins, Catherine and Nick. Inner conflicts such as those endured by Michael and Toby were occasionally dealt with.

##### **Q3(b)**

More than three times the number of candidates for this text opted for this question rather than the previous one. There was a clear distinction between those who assumed it was a question about character, and those who perceived it to be a question about narrative technique. There were some excellent answers which managed to deal with the different perspectives offered by the named characters: Michael’s viewpoint for our perceptions of Nick, Toby and Catherine; Dora’s of Paul and the various community members; Toby’s of Michael, Nick and Dora are just a few of those mentioned. Links to a more omniscient narrator and how she often corrected skewed perceptions by her characters, was another technique sometimes, but not always, discussed. Lower band answers often tended to be character studies, but there was some underachievement from candidates who offered

incomplete answers which did not attempt to engage with every facet of the question. The concept of the twenty-first century reader is not intended to confuse, but rather to put the candidate as the focus for any response to the question. It may also suggest the differences between now and the time of writing with its different attitudes to the obvious issues such as homosexuality: two candidates mentioned the Wolfenden Report which was presumably roughly contemporary with the writing of the novel.

**Forster: *Howards End***

The answers on this text were very evenly divided between the two questions.

**Q4(a)**

Success in this question was partly dependant on an understanding of ‘culture’ and ‘class’. Class was usually quite well understood and defined although the gradations between them are often elusive; there is still some uncertainty of exactly where Leonard fits into the class structure of the day. Culture proved to be more problematic. The world of a concert hall and a symphony may be a long way from most candidates’ experiences of culture but some enlightenment was presumably included in the teaching of the novel. We are not in a music hall, nor is the work being played an opera. The diverse responses to the music were often a good point of entry but the nature of the experience was unclear to many candidates who did not venture beyond mere description. It was quite valid to include discussion of the uncultured Wilcoxes as well as the cultural world from which characters such as Mrs Wilcox and Leonard Bast come. The ideas behind ‘brings...together and divides’ was generally well done. Leonard’s elusive quest, his poverty and his marriage led to some diverse exploration of key moments in the text. His ignorance of how to pronounce certain words, his loss of the umbrella, the cost of the ticket to the concert, his flat, the walk, the trip to Oniton, later encounters with Helen and his death scene all provided valid material for discussion.

**Q4(b)**

Success in this question was dependant on responding to the key word in the proposition: ‘presentation’. Many candidates nevertheless described or analysed what they regarded as un/successful relationships. The other main discriminator was whether or not the accounts were descriptive/narrative or analytical. There were enjoyable accounts which dealt with imagery, connection and male/female relationships within the novel. There were some interesting explorations of the Henry/ Margaret relationship and the problems it encountered with a realisation that it had to be resolved by the end of the novel with Henry’s defeat and the product of Helen and Leonard’s odd relationship in possession at Howards End. More conventional and lower band responses agreed with the proposition and dealt with relationships in a list-like way.

**Achebe: *Things Fall Apart*.**

**Q5(a)**

This was the more popular question being tackled by roughly three times the number of candidates as the (b) question.

There were some high quality answers which debated the topic quite rigorously, often leading to interesting discussions of other facets of the Igbo culture which were also important to them. Good answers would be likely to deal with the ways in which Igbo culture is presented through the language and narrative technique. Many lower band accounts tended to be illustrative of relationships, focusing on one or two - mainly Okonkwo and his father or Okonkwo and Nwoye or Okonkwo and Ikemefuna. If the named chapter was to be dealt with adequately the latter could hardly be ignored. There were some interesting discussions of the role of the Oracle and superstition; powers that after

all persuaded Okonkwo to commit his violent act against his adopted son. Some discussion of the role of women and relationships with wives and daughters was also quite valid.

**Q5(b)**

Many excellent answers dealt with the presentation of the laws of both the Igbo and the white men very effectively. They could identify the manipulative role of the writer and be critical of his presentation of Igbo culture. The uncritical acceptance of Achebe's depiction of the often highly discriminatory laws of the Igbo was one approach which could be contrasted with the idea of a balanced view of the two sets of laws, perhaps ignoring the unpleasant aspects of both. Some very good higher band answers examined the inconsistencies of the laws and how they might have contributed to the falling apart of the culture at the end of the novel. Candidates answering on this text are often very good at bringing in and integrating their knowledge of the historical, literary and social contexts.

## 6395/01: Poetry and Drama

### General

'What made the marking very enjoyable this year was the large number of candidates who were not afraid to let their own enthusiasms for a writer shine through.'

So begins one examiner's contribution to the compilation of reports that follow. And although critical distance, objectivity and soundness of judgement are all qualities prized by examiners, candidates' own fresh responses are especially welcome.

There is the very opposite, of course. It comes in the form of the second hand response, based on notes made in class, written into books and regurgitated in exams, often ignoring the specific question being asked. There is evidence of this, too, in what follows. A rewarding number of candidates, however, do something else - make the texts their own, and respond individually and often enthusiastically to the questions being asked of them.

The new specifications require that texts used in exam rooms are 'clean'. Candidates preparing for this last year of the current syllabus might be advised not to cover their copies of the plays and poems in too many notes, in order to resist the temptation of copying them out in then exam. At the moment many candidates have almost too much to say - and it is not always relevant to the question being asked. This comment applies particularly to the poetry section of the paper.

The drama section presents another problem. Candidates seem to have become submerged by what they have been taught, straying from the idea of seeing the play as a play. The best responses in this section came from candidates who could see the plays as plays and not as regurgitated notes.

### SECTION A: PRE-1770 POETRY

#### CHAUCER: The Merchant's Prologue and Tale

##### Q1 (a)

The question asked about the 'artificiality of character and situation' in the *Prologue and Tale*, especially in the light of episodes with gods. There were some excellent answers to this popular question and candidates were able to use their knowledge of fabliau and the courtly love convention to good effect. The assertion claimed that the *Tale* has little to say about 'the real world'. One examiner wrote, 'It was a pleasure to see the variety of views emerging in higher band answers, where students were able to respond with enthusiasm to the different worlds involved in this task.' Some took issue with the assertion, arguing that the Pluto - Proserpina episode was the most realistic episode in the whole tale. A few candidates read 'artificiality of character' to refer to individual characters' lies and hypocrisy and wrote rather confused answers as a result.

##### Q1 (b)

Candidates were asked about the importance of rank and status. Some interesting responses challenged the concept of the assertion and argued that whilst rank and status were important, so too was power, and the *Tale* actually empowered those with least rank, such as May. Higher band answers also examined how Chaucer parodies conventions such as courtly love, thereby questioning contemporary ideas about rank and status. 'It was a pleasure to see how students willingly engaged with the language and ideas of the text,' enthused one examiner, 'with answers frequently revealing a real enthusiasm for the playfulness of the narrative.'

## MILTON: *Selected Poems*

There were too few answers to these questions to justify commentary in this report.

### **Edexcel Poetry Anthology**

#### **Q3 (a)**

The question asked about poets' responses to tone, and the passing of time. It also directed students to writing about imagery. Some candidates made interesting contrasts and compared the wistfulness of 'To Daffodils' with the energy of a poem such as 'To His Coy Mistress'. There was also an exploration in some answers to the hope of an afterlife (as in Herbert's 'Love') and how this contrasted with the finality and lack of hope in some writers' attitudes to death.

#### **Q3 (b)**

There were fewer answers to this question on the poet's, often satirical, voice that questions the way things are in society. A number of responses struggled with the concept of 'satirical' and wrote rather generally about poetry and society. The notion of a poet's 'voice' also eluded many. However there were some excellent answers that revealed a real understanding of the way poetry works and a realisation that the voice of the poem might not be the same thing as the voice of the poet.

### **Eight Metaphysical Poets, ed. Dalglish**

#### **Q4 (a)**

'She is all states and all princes I' was a quotation from Donne that appeared regularly in answer to this question on the alleged tenderness and intimacy of metaphysical poetry, despite its displays of cleverness. There was a good range of attitudes in response. Some students did not contextualise their chosen poems sufficiently and therefore did not develop ideas about metaphysical poetry as a genre in detail. Higher band answers were able to do this and wrote convincingly, either agreeing or disagreeing with the proposition, giving specific examples of tenderness and intimacy.

#### **Q4 (b)**

The question on the surprise and shock effect of metaphysical poetry on its readers, then and now, received fewer answers. Students tended to generalise in some cases, assuming that everyone in the seventeenth century was religious and that no one in the twenty first is. Some very good answers commented on the almost erotic way in which religion is talked about in the poetry, and discussed whether or not this would have been as 'shocking' to contemporary readers as it is to us today.

### **POPE: *The Rape of the Lock***

#### **5(a)**

Answers on Pope's world being one of no fixed values were very varied. Some wrote convincingly about Pope's sense of satire, and his fusion of the serious and non serious. Less successful answers were confused by the idea that tragedy and comedy could co-exist in the poem. Being asked to consider the reader's response in terms of 'you hardly know whether to laugh or weep' was a new situation for them and one they found it difficult to write about.

#### **5(b)**

The assertion contained a non sequitur. 'Pope writes about a society far removed from our own. Therefore he has little to say to the modern reader'. Candidates tended to agree with it however - even when they could see the success of the poetry, some were adamant

in their belief that Pope does indeed have little to say to the modern reader, finding his world too elitist and self-absorbed to be of relevance to their world. More successful answers had a good grasp of the satirical aspects of the text as well as contextual knowledge.

## **SECTION B: POST-1770 POETRY**

### **TENNYSON: *Selected Poems***

#### **Q6 (a)**

The question asked candidates to consider the individuality of the voice of the speaker in Tennyson's poetry alongside the context - the spirit of the age in which the poems were written. Some candidates seemed to fall back on writing out class notes on the poems, copied more or less from what was written on their texts, and neglected writing about context. More successful answers made some headway with the spirit of the age and there were some interesting answers that saw Tennyson as a poet writing for his age even when his subject matter was classical. 'Ulysses' was a popular starting point and candidates were able to use the closing lines successfully in this answer.

#### **Q6 (b)**

The Lady of Shalott, Oenone and Mariana were popular choices here in answering about the role of women in Tennyson's poetry. 'The women in the poems were clearly a source of real interest for candidates who often wrote with real force and clarity about why women were interesting and strong. There were some really varied responses,' wrote one examiner.

### **YEATS: *Selected Poems***

#### **Q7(a)**

Candidates found 'The Second Coming' a useful starting point for their consideration of Yeats's search for 'order and peace in a world of chaos.' Some answers were able to trace the development of this search over several poems and did so convincingly. There was little consideration of form and structure however in many answers. Some, however, found a link between the discovery of order and peace in the structure of poetry, and the lack of it in the outside world.

#### **Q7 (b)**

Candidates wrote about escapism and passion in this answer which was, on the whole, less convincingly handled than (a). They tended to find it difficult to engage with the way passionate intensity can be portrayed through poetry, especially when combining this with 'poems that embrace causes in the real world' as the question asked. Again consideration of form and structure was often neglected.

### **DUFFY: *Selected Poems***

#### **Q8 (a)**

This question was about Duffy's 'courage to explore issues that society conventionally ignores'. The discriminator here tended to be the word 'courage', which led the best answers into writing about the way Duffy writes and the unique qualities of her poetry. Less successful answers focused on the issues themselves, and tended to neglect the poetry, with sweeping generalisations sometimes about the 1980s - the assumed context for all Duffy's writing. 'Warming her Pearls' was used well as a starting point, with only a minority of answers misunderstanding the word 'mistress' and so missing the point about power structure..

### Q8 (b)

The assertion stated that ‘the thrilling sense of the dangerous world in which we live ... makes Duffy’s poetry so vividly alive.’ There were some excellent answers to this, with candidates responding to the edginess of the world that Duffy presents to her readers. Instead of seeing the poems from the point of view of poetry readers, some candidates took the point of view of Duffy’s psychopaths and other misfit characters themselves, and saw the thrilling sense of danger from their perspective. It was not the approach that might have been predicted, and led to a rather chilling degree of empathy with the personas, but nevertheless there were many engaged and well argued answers.

### LARKIN: *The Whitsun Weddings*

#### Q9 (a)

‘A Study of Reading habits’ was given as the starting point poem for an exploration of Larkin’s sense of humour and on the whole it worked very well, with the best candidates detecting changes of tone and attitude within individual poems. Successful candidates could point out the satirical and self-mocking nature of Larkin’s poetry. ‘Sunny Prestatyn’ occurred quite frequently in answers too, with sensitivity to tone being a discriminator here - less successful answers sometimes simply finding the poem totally ‘funny’ and missing nuances. Close reading skills were in evidence; candidates were free to interpret the assertion as they wished and, as a result, some did not agree with the idea that Larkin’s poem was rescued from bleakness by its humour.

#### Q9 (b)

The assertion put forward the idea that Larkin’s poetry is ‘that of the loner, commenting on society from a distance’. Again there were many excellent answers with appropriate contextual awareness - the ‘post war’ tone to the poetry and Larkin’s relationship to the concerns of The Movement, for example. There were some very thorough explorations of ‘The Whitsun Weddings’ and other appropriate poems. Less successful responses sometimes found difficulty with the word ‘loner’, assuming that it was linked to the idea of ‘loneliness’. This in turn led to some irrelevant writing about the geographical isolation of Hull and the lonesomeness of librarians.

### The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry

There were too few answers to these questions to justify commentary in this report.

### HEANEY: *New Selected Poems*

#### Q11 (a)

The assertion claimed that Heaney’s poetry gains its strength from the way it focuses our attention on the oppressed and the sidelined in society. Candidates showed a sensitive appreciation of Heaney’s poetry, exploring the poetic devices as well as the language within the given poem, ‘The Wife’s Tale’, and selecting a wide range of poems to develop their arguments. The discriminating factor tended to be the extent to which they engaged with the phrase, ‘focuses our attention on.’ The most successful responses chose to write about Heaney’s use of historical material and its implications for his contemporary readership.

#### Q11(b)

Almost all candidates wrote confidently about poems which address the loss of innocence (‘Lose your innocence. Look with increased awareness at the world around you!’ was Heaney’s message, according to the assertion) and they found a wealth of material from which to choose. Candidates tended to interpret this question in one of two ways - either by referring to Heaney’s poems about childhood, or those about the Troubles and national

loss of innocence. Both approaches worked equally well. There were in addition some excellent answers that managed to combine both approaches.

## **SECTION C: PRE-1770 DRAMA**

### **SHAKESPEARE: *Othello***

#### **Q12 (a)**

The question was about the power structure in relationships and the given starting point was dialogue between Cassio and Bianca. It was good to see candidates writing about Bianca as she has often been overlooked in answers in the past, and valuable points were made, not only about Cassio but about the attitudes of society as a whole. As always in answers on *Othello* there were responses that concerned themselves predominantly with Iago and his relationship with his superior, but even these could pick up some points about the way the power structure was reversed here with the Ancient being the one who could dominate the General. There were some interesting responses on the ambiguities of Emilia's power within relationships.

#### **Q12 (b)**

The assertion was about the contrasting worlds of love and duty, and students responded well and directly to this question. Less successful answers fell back on listing themes and characters, but most were able to recognize that the tragedy of the play lies in this conflict and dealt well with Othello's idea of his duty in murdering Desdemona (or discussing whether this idea of 'duty' is not simply an excuse for his behaviour). These good answers also ranged across a number of characters - Emilia's betrayal of her duty to Desdemona because of her apparent love for Iago was handled well.

### **MARLOWE: *Dr Faustus***

#### **Q13 (a)**

The assertion claimed that, although we know in advance what will happen in the play, we do not lose interest: the great battle of Good versus Evil holds our attention. It led students into writing about the play as a play (AO2). Some very interesting answers took issue with the assertion, saying that the Chorus only suggests Faustus's fate and that the audience of the time, so versed in the morality play, would still have expected repentance, no matter how last minute. One candidate wrote about the contemporary audience expectation for 'horror, fear and delight; a desire to see the forbidden played out on stage' with particular reference to the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins.

#### **Q13 (b)**

Fewer candidates tackled this question, where the assertion was that the play is a collection of long speeches only, having no real dramatic impact on an audience today. A minority agreed wholeheartedly, tending to dismiss the play in this way; some, however, relished the prospect of writing about the sub plot and pointed out the liveliness and vigour of these scenes and the dramatic function they serve in contrasting with the poetry of the main plot. Again it was good to see candidates writing about the play as a play.

### **WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi***

#### **Q14 (a)**

The assertion was that outside forces will eventually destroy the individual, and the Duchess's line 'the misery of us that are born great' was used to exemplify this. There were some excellent answers which understood that the answer did not have to focus exclusively on the Duchess herself, but considered the effect of outside forces. Some argued that Ferdinand's lycanthropy was an internal force, brought about by his

suppressed internal desire; one ingenious response turned this on its head to argue that the disease was a punishment for his desires, and was therefore an ‘outside force’ demonstrating the power of God. Some excellent answers considered the imagery as Webster’s creation of a world where human actions seem irrelevant or predetermined, so exploring Webster’s vision rather than simply the fate of individuals within the play. A few answers also dealt with the metatheatrical framework to which Webster deliberately alludes when the Duchess speaks of being ‘in a play’, the stagey theatrical tricks of Webster’s dramaturgy being a constant reminder that there is indeed an ‘outside force’ directing the whole text - the dramatist himself.

#### **Q14 (b)**

‘This is a play about a woman and her values which hold firm in a world of vile men’ claimed the assertion. There was much well informed discussion of the complexities of Webster’s characterisation of the Duchess and the ambivalence that a contemporary audience may well have felt towards her defiance of convention. Students were quick to realise that not all men in the play are ‘vile’ although some pointed out that vileness and corruption were an essential aspect of characterisation in a Revenge Tragedy. Bosola was explored in terms of moral ambiguities.

#### **CONGREVE: *The Way of the World***

#### **Q15 (a)**

The assertion claimed that ‘fears of growing old and not being loved are turned into laughable follies in the comic world of the play’ and there was an interesting range of answers both agreeing and disagreeing with this proposition. Some claimed that such fears are presented as all too real and serious within the play: Congreve’s purpose was to draw his audience both to laugh at and yet also to pity Lady Wishfort in particular. The moral purpose and depth of characterisation set the play apart from the more two dimensional, harshly satirical and amoral world of other restoration comedies, which is why *The Way of the World* transcends its era. Such answers were a joy to mark.

#### **Q15 (b)**

Fewer answers tackled this question, which invited responses to the claim that Congreve is only writing about a narrow spectrum of society not ‘the world’, as in the title. Again there were some interesting and occasionally outstanding answers, with some claiming that Congreve’s world is a microcosm, reflecting what is going on in the larger, outside world and, as such, remaining relevant to the present day.

#### **FARQUHAR: *The Recruiting Officer***

There were too few answers to these questions to justify commentary in this report.

### **SECTION D: POST-1770 DRAMA**

#### **SHERIDAN: *The Rivals***

#### **Q17 (a)**

The question was on ‘Mrs Malaprop’s malapropisms’ and whether or not they were more than just a ‘passing joke.’ Most answers felt there was a serious issue at stake about the education of women in particular and failures within society. The excessive control exerted by the older generation was also mentioned. Good use was made of the Prologue and Epilogue, if spoken by Julia, answers pointing out that ‘unlike Lydia, Julia has educated herself and is therefore able to see life for what it really is.’ There was some disagreement with the assertion that the play simply focuses on ‘cleverness’. Many answers claimed that it was more concerned with the restrictions imposed by society.

### Q17(b)

The question was about the appeal of the play to a modern day audience especially in light of its 'shallow, self-seeking characters'. There were some clearly focused answers, the best of which managed to write about the play itself rather than the superficiality of people in society today with only implicit relevance to Sheridan's drama. As with the answers to the question above, most students interpreted the play as having a serious moral point to make, despite the comedy.

### WALCOTT: *The Odyssey*

There were too few answers to these questions to justify commentary in this report.

### SHAFFER: *Amadeus*

#### Q19 (a)

The assertion claimed that we relate to the mediocrity of Salieri because we ourselves 'have ordinary talents and belong in an ordinary world'. It was a question which seemed to work well because it drew candidates into writing about their own response to the play. The best answers were able to combine considering their feelings about characters and the empathy they felt with consideration of the play as a play and its dramatic structure (not just treating characters as if they were 'real'). Candidates dealt well with conflicting feelings and a discriminator was the extent to which they could analyse these.

#### Q19 (b)

Fewer candidates tackled this question, which was about the importance of music in the play in relation to its conflicts, but many of those who did responded in a very lively and fresh way. One wrote: 'While Shaffer uses the spectacular crescendo of Mozart's music to inspire conflict between Salieri and God, it also allows the audience to get a glimpse inside the fragile and overwhelmed mind of Salieri; to appreciate the sheer talent of Mozart and to see just how much and why Salieri reveres him as God's representative on Earth.'

### WILDE: *Lady Windermere's Fan*

#### Q20 (a)

Candidates responded well to this question about what lies beneath the surface of the apparently trivial dialogue. Answers explored the language and the doubles entendres, and were able to point out the ways in which Wilde was criticising society and its values. They said things like 'Lord Darlington is presented as a rogue ... despite seeming trivial he is a danger to Lady Windermere as he has no morality to stop him from trying to persuade her to elope with him and expose her to the viciousness and criticisms of their society.' When this was illustrated clearly the answers were very sound and showed evident enjoyment and appreciation of the play.

#### Q20 (b)

This question suggested that the play is skilful in engaging the audience's sympathy for someone who would have been condemned by society as a 'bad mother'. It provoked some deeply thoughtful and sensitive answers. One candidate asked 'Who's the good mother in this play? The Duchess of Berwick does the right thing by society's rules but cares only for her daughter's material comfort and allows her no personal choice - and her own marriage is surely not an example to follow; Lady Windermere is willing to abandon her child and has to be reminded of his needs by her own (unidentified) mother; we even question whether Lady Windermere would want to know her real mother - she has been worshipping an illusion, the perfect young woman in the photograph - audiences may want to see Mrs Erlynne reunited with her daughter but Mrs Erlynne knows better. This is surely Wilde's devastating critique of his society's double standards.'

### WERTENBAKER: *Our Country's Good*

There were too few answers to these questions to justify commentary in this report.



## 6396/01: Criticism and Comparison

### General

For Section A, Q1 and Q2, candidates read a piece of unprepared prose or poetry. They are asked to respond to this material in a commentary that focuses on form, language and structure. This year some examiners have questioned how well prepared candidates are for this part of the paper. A number of responses were rather brief with a tendency to focus on content rather than the method of the writer. Candidates also seem to have little idea how to structure a critical commentary, often working through a passage/poem line by line without any sense of the whole. In contrast to this, it is good to be able to report that the best candidates continue to write fluently and perceptively on their chosen extract or poem, selecting appropriate detail to illustrate the critical points they make and to support their reading.

As candidates are aware, in Section B the focus shifts to comparison and contrast along with considerations of genre and context. The questions are worded in such a way as to guide candidates to meet the relevant criteria in their responses. The majority of the candidates have clearly been well taught, know their texts very well and write about them with considerable engagement and enthusiasm but the most successful responses remain those where the candidate has given careful consideration to the wording of the question and planned their response to it before starting to write. Such candidates show their understanding and knowledge of their texts by selecting appropriate and relevant detail to support the argument they are putting forward. Candidates need to remember that this is a comparative task. There are still many candidates who show secure knowledge and understanding of the texts they have studied but make very little direct comparison or contrast between them. The best responses range between their texts, interweaving appropriate textual and contextual detail in the development of their argument.

### SECTION A: UNPREPARED PROSE OR POETRY

#### Q1 Unprepared Prose

The selected passage from, *A Change of Climate*, by Hilary Mantel was clearly enjoyed by candidates. It proved accessible to the majority although the occasional careless reading of the given information led to some confusion between Sandra and Mrs Glasse. As one examiner noted, 'candidates were able to focus on aspects like the narrative voice, point of view, dialogues and the effect of weather and colour imagery'. Nevertheless, although candidates often referred to the word 'presents' in the question they did not seem to understand that it was a literary construct with a specific purpose. For many it was enough to comment in a more descriptive way, use a quotation and then say 'in this way she presents the setting' without making any attempt to analyse the language. It was also unfortunate that some terms like 'pathetic fallacy' (for the landscape) and 'bathos' (for the unexpectedly 'ordinary' appearance of Mrs Glasse) were plainly learnt and then named without any real consideration of their applicability to the passage under consideration.

As anticipated the weather came in for much comment and many saw it as symbolic of the troubled situation and the characters' agitated minds. There was some very perceptive work with colour in terms of the symbolism of red-haired Glasse women. This was either understood as danger in general, or the temptress attracting the son from university. These candidates also tended to recognise that the reds get stronger - from 'dusky' to 'red haired' to 'deeper red' and made various suggestions as to the significance of this. The beautiful description of the light at the close of the passage also became a focus of consideration with some seeing it as a symbol of Mrs Glasse's domesticity and tenacity, others of the blossoming relationship between Ralph and his hostess, or of the families

generally. As anticipated in the mark scheme, it was only higher band candidates who explored (or indeed noticed) the shifts in narrative viewpoint or who considered the impact of the dialogue in their assessment of the two characters.

This passage did not present any problem in terms of understanding but what was a discriminator between candidates here was the way in which they approached the task. One examiner, in some disappointment, described candidates writing as if they 'were required to act as detectives and work out what was "really" going on rather than engaging in close reading and analysing of how Mantel uses form, structure and language'. The best responses, as ever, wrote fluently and perceptively about the passage as a whole, showing what the varied stylistic elements contributed to their own reading.

## **Q2 Unprepared Poetry**

The poem was very accessible but many candidates wanted to read rather more into it instead of accepting it to be, as one candidate described, 'a poignant missive to an absent sibling'. Surprisingly there was some confusion as to where the absent brother was living and a few thought that the brother's name was Barbados and referred to him as such throughout their commentary. There was also some unhelpful speculation about context - such as the suggestion that this poem is referring to the unhappy experience of a Barbadian family in England during the 1970s, and their desires to return home.

Many thought there was much imagery symbolic of death and thus speculated as to whether the brother was dead or dying, or even away at war fighting as a soldier; others considered the brother back at home was perhaps terminally ill, suicidal or just getting old and thinking about his own mortality. Careful reading of the poem several times is a prerequisite of a successful answer; some candidates spent time considering in some detail whether the persona was male or female, clearly not having read as far as, 'There are words not used between brothers'. Others speculated somewhat pointlessly as to whether they were really brothers or simply good friends.

Most saw the nature of the relationship between the two brothers as the main focus of the poem but they often had difficulty in gauging the tone.

Many found it 'bitter' or 'sarcastic', often basing this assessment on a single phrase plucked out of its context. The doves came in for much symbolic treatment and the killing of the sickly one caused some outrage, with one candidate asserting that the brother's hobby was 'bird killing'. More perceptive responses drew some sensitive and telling parallels between the feathers of the dove and the white magnolia blossoms, with one candidate observing: previous imagery of floating white blossoms is revived through the poet equating the dead dove's loosened white feathers with falling blossoms, death being presented organically and peacefully.

Candidates explored the natural imagery in some detail, seeing this as a link between the brothers. The images of fruitfulness and new life in Barbados were frequently contrasted with the blossoms 'withering like cotton rags'; similarly, the 'dinning sun' was set against the 'darkening garden'. Yet these observations were often left to speak for themselves rather than being the starting point for further analysis

As with the prose, there was a distinction between personal, emotional - sometimes highly perceptive - responses, and technical analysis of the poetic devices used. Many candidates were seduced into the former, palpably enjoyed their experience with the poem, but not developing it into a critical commentary

The best focused responses connected mood and relationship to subtle features like the internal rhyme of 'hills' and 'spills', the debris implied by 'cotton rags' and the 'polysemy' in 'everything remains as it was' - it both continues to be, and has been left behind as the 'remains' of a relationship.

## SECTION B: COMPARATIVE STUDY

### The Comic Perspective

#### Q3(a)

This option is the second most popular choice with the great majority of candidates choosing to study two works by Jane Austen. Although it provides such a stimulating contrast, fewer centres are offering *Larry's Party*, perhaps because they lack the time to work on two new texts for this paper.

Candidates evidently enjoy studying these novels and write about them with enthusiasm. Q3(a) this year asked candidates to consider how integral the comic perspective was to the novels as a whole. Weaker answers often settled for illustrating 'much that is comic', largely ignoring the second half of the proposition. The phrase 'true home' was sometimes interpreted rather literally as *Pemberley* and *Donwell Abbey* while others took it to mean 'the home that characters deserved' and concentrated their attentions on *Charlotte Lucas*, *Harriet Smith* and *Jane Fairfax*. Candidates not only knew their texts but were also well versed in relevant contemporary social manners and mores and these were obviously relevant here. The most successful answers focused on *Emma* and *Elizabeth*, showing how their search was both different and similar. Such candidates were able to use their extensive textual knowledge to show how the comic perspective did not limit but indeed highlighted the serious concerns of the novels.

#### Q3(b)

Q3(b) invited candidates to focus on the narrative method and its impact on them as readers. Weaker candidates tended to fall back on illustrating the comedy and often showed themselves uncertain as to the effect of the narrative voice. There were a number of confident answers

which ranged across the novels seeing the comedy as a means of revealing the narrator's negative views of society. Many took issue with the proposition, particularly with regard to *Pride and Prejudice*, and were able to draw on a wide range of textual and contextual material to support their arguments. This was the slightly less popular question but it was generally better answered with a number of candidates demonstrating an appreciative awareness of Austen's technique.

### The Tragic Perspective

#### Q4 (a)

The combination of Bronte and Hardy remains a popular one and one or two examiners reported seeing some interesting responses from candidates who had studied *Petals of Blood*, although this remains very much a minority text. Examiners were on the whole impressed by the responses in this option, one examiner noting, 'Most students demonstrated a real knowledge and understanding of the texts and were very sensitive to the historical and cultural influences brought to bear on them. There was a strong grasp of the tragic tradition and students used these ideas to help interpret the novels'. While weaker answers did tend to offer character studies of *Eustacia*, *Clym*, *Catherine* and *Heathcliff* with little discussion of social conventions, more successful responses challenged the truth of the notion in regard to *Wuthering Heights*, arguing that social conventions and trying to adhere to them was what prompted the tragic demise of *Catherine* and *Heathcliff*. They frequently contrasted this with the situation in *The Return of the Native* and were able to develop a persuasive argument, supported by an impressive range of textual reference and direct quotation. This was, of course, not the only way to argue the case and others gave compelling reasons for agreeing with the proposition. One general criticism would be that the notion of 'wholly tragic' could, and should, have been explored more fully.

#### **Q4(b)**

This was the more popular question, with many candidates seeing 'landscape and society' as an invitation to rehearse some familiar material, on the landscape of the novels in particular. Examiners reported that candidates tended to focus on landscape or society but few did full justice to both. Inevitably there was much attention paid to the Heath in *The Return of the Native* and much discussion of its role and influence, while many felt that the moors had a less tangible effect on the tragedy in *Wuthering Heights*. The notion of the tragic outcome being 'inevitable' was debated by more able candidates who frequently made the case for the characters' own actions being at least in part responsible for what occurs. As a general point, candidates choosing this option seem to find it more difficult, perhaps because of the very different nature of the texts, to structure their responses to provide continuous comparison and contrast. Too often the texts are considered separately with only a token attempt at comparison in the final paragraphs.

#### **Divided Societies**

#### **Q5(a)**

This option would appear to be gaining in popularity and, although the majority continue to offer the two nineteenth century novels, *Atonement* is clearly enjoyed and appreciated by the relatively small number of students who study it. This question attracted considerably fewer responses than its alternative, although there were some wide ranging and perceptive answers. Key to success was the definition of 'personal morality' and 'social justice', but many candidates remained rather vague on these concepts. Nevertheless, relevant material was considered with Thornton and Boucher's working practices coming under scrutiny along with the predicament of the Higginses, Boucher and Stephen Blackpool. Candidates had no difficulty in including Margaret in their argument but often provided rather forced and unconvincing comparisons with Louisa when they would have done better to focus on Sissy. Those few who had studied *Atonement* made much of the role of Paul Marshall but also examined the position of Bryony and Cecilia. The 'uncertain relationship' was often left unexplored but one examiner reported some strong responses where candidates made, 'perceptive and eloquent arguments on authors' choice and intent in writing these novels with regard to industrialization and philanthropy'.

#### **Q5(b)**

This question, which directed candidates to focus on the role of the female characters in their chosen texts, was by far the more popular option. Margaret was compared with both Sissy and Louisa, but Mrs Thornton, Mrs Hale, Aunt Shaw, Edith, Bessy, Mrs Gradgrind, Rachel, Mrs Pegler and Mrs Sparsit were all cited at one time or another, though mercifully not all in the same essay! Nevertheless some of the weaker answers did adopt something of a catalogue approach, showing their evident knowledge of the texts but not engaging in the argument. *Atonement* provided interesting comparisons both in the characters of Mrs Tallis, Bryony and Cecilia and in the disparate social setting and examiners were pleased to see mature and perceptive comparisons being made by candidates between this text and *North and South*. Those who had studied the two nineteenth century novels often drew attention to male characters who were equally unable to effect change. While many considered Margaret Hale to be more successful than other female characters in effecting change, they frequently and relevantly attributed this to the different nature and purpose of the novel that Gaskell was writing as opposed to Dickens or McEwan.

Once again, examiners were impressed by the way in which candidates responded to the texts in this option which clearly interest and engage them.

#### **Broken Communication**

Since what was written in last year's report still remains the case, it is well worth repeating.

This is by far the most popular option. It has been remarked repeatedly but still remains the case that candidates who have studied this drama option often seem unwilling to engage with the terms of the questions set, relying instead on prepared material which they are determined to use, come what may. This is particularly the case when the second text studied has been Translations where candidates are armed with ideas on language as power, colonialism or broken communication which they write about, irrespective of the actual question set.

#### **Q6(a)**

The intent of this question was that candidates should focus on particular challenges to communication in comparing and contrasting their texts. Examiners found that weaker candidates struggled to understand the question as a whole and often lost sight of the communication factor. Candidates who had studied Translations with *The Tempest* often saw the 'arrival of outsiders' as a prompt to unload all their considerable contextual material on colonialism with little regard to the question as a whole; others had a pre-prepared 'failed communication' essay, which they tried to fit to the demands of the question. One examiner concluded gloomily : There was little originality of thought in these responses, which often seemed a re-working of preparatory questions that candidates may have answered.

The most productive answers were those that took a thoughtful approach to both the nature of communication and the notion of who constitutes an outsider. Those who had studied the Albee play as their second text seemed to focus more clearly on the question and the best responses looked at similar characters across the texts i.e. Prospero and George, magic and the illusion of the child. Many concluded that the arrival of outsiders, though unwelcome, often enabled 'the ways in which people communicate' to change for the better, and that the process could be cathartic.

#### **Q6(b)**

Some examiners felt that this question elicited stronger responses. Some candidates, looking at the notion of actions, contended that most stemmed from words and thus it was difficult to separate the two; this led to some interesting and thoughtful argument. Other successful answers identified that the magic of Prospero, the gun of George or the military might of Lancey were ultimately more powerful than words but then went on to show that this was not the ultimate message that the playwrights wished to convey. Such candidates often used on textual knowledge intelligently to suggest why the reactions of a twenty first century audience might or might not be similar to that of a contemporary audience.

On the other hand, weaker candidates paid little attention to the specifics of the question or to the fact that they were writing about plays where 'actions' are designed to be seen on stage. The 'broken communication' material or the 'language as power' essay were seen as more or less appropriate to the task and gave such candidates at least the opportunity to display their textual knowledge.

### **Nature and the Imagination**

This option is, sadly, becoming less popular every year with fewer than 150 responses seen this year. What is clear from the student responses is that, where this option is taught, it is taught by enthusiasts who have communicated their enthusiasm to their students who, almost without exception, show a detailed knowledge of the poetry and a clear focus on poetic issues in their responses.

#### **Q7(a)**

This was much the more popular question calling as it did for candidates to evaluate the central concerns of their chosen poets. Weaker candidates frequently opened with an assertion such as 'they are both Romantic poets' which seemed, for some, to indicate that nature must be their central concern. Even so, such candidates were very aware that there

were differences in approach between the two poets and, by drawing comparison between them, often came to the conclusion that Keats was more concerned with the human subject although this had not been demonstrated by any close analysis of the poetry. Keats's criticism of Wordsworth's 'egotistical sublime' was often mentioned and in better responses was linked into discussion of each writer's conceptualisation of self and how it is identified with or differentiated from nature. There were some extremely well-developed comparisons supported by detailed textual reference and such candidates were keen to demonstrate that the opposition implied in the proposition did not in fact exist. Candidates were often very familiar with and engaged by their texts, sometimes betraying a clear preference for the work of one poet rather than the other but usually in a controlled way which added edge and focus to their argument as a whole. There were perhaps only three or four responses on Edward Thomas and these were disappointingly weak with candidates unwilling to regard him in any other light than as a First World War poet.

### **Q7(b)**

This question was not attempted by many. It asked candidates to explore the particular impact of nature upon their chosen poets. Most candidates made little attempt to define 'rememberable things' so that it was refreshing to find a candidate who offered a definition at the outset: 'Rememberable things' seems to refer, in the case of both poets, to things that cannot be forgotten, either sources of pain or pleasure, triggered in their minds due to the effect of nature on them.

Candidates were not short of material here and many had an impressive knowledge of their texts, being able to quote at length to illustrate what was rememberable to the individual poets. Unfortunately very few went on to 'explore the importance' of these experiences for the poets.

### **The Social Observer**

This remains the more popular of the poetry options although there seemed to be fewer centres offering Auden this year. The tendency, noted last year, to study a fairly narrow range of poems seems to be as prevalent this year with examiners often commenting on the disappointingly limited number of poems being cited. It must be stressed that familiarity with the whole range of the set poems is the best preparation for this examination, since it enables the candidate to select according to the demands of the question and to engage fully with the task of comparison and contrast.

### **8(a)**

Candidates were presented with a straightforward proposition upon which to focus their comparison of their chosen poets. Many answers relied on an examination of 'London' and 'Slough' respectively, going on to refer to other poems but not necessarily to examine them in any detail. 'The Unknown Citizen' often featured in the responses of those who had studied Auden but these were very few in number. Weaker candidates showed little awareness of their texts as poetry and tended to assert the proposition and then find textual evidence to support it. More successful answers took note of 'the primary concern' in their assessment of the poetry and made a good selection of material from a wider range of poems in support of their argument. They noted such points as that, for instance, even when Betjeman is focussing on individuals, as in 'The Executive', he is describing a type and thereby criticising a whole swathe of society. The best answers focused on contrast rather than similarity, in tone and poetic method, and also in contextual assumptions. Blake's Rousseauistic radicalism, for example, being set against Betjeman's post-Victorian cultural anxieties about Englishness.

**8(b)**

The question invited candidates to focus on the tone and attitude taken by their chosen poets to their subject matter. Most candidates were able to catalogue examples of acute observation but weaker candidates were unable to define the attitudes of their poets beyond saying that they were different. Stronger responses tended to look at the poems in a more thematic way or to have a social focus, considering for example, the treatment of children and attitudes to the church. Higher band answers focused on and defined 'observation' in terms of the relative engagement and detachment of their two poets, with some arguing that Betjeman could not be viewed as detached because of the autobiographical nature of some of his poetry. Contextual material was used effectively to reinforce and explain the differences in attitude and tone, with Blake's anger and overt criticism being set against the more mocking and amused tones of Betjeman.

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