

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/01  
Paper 1 (Open Books)

## General comments

There was a great deal of work at all levels which was refreshingly lively. It is, perhaps, as well to remember how important pleasure should be in this area of the curriculum.

Like last year, most of the texts were covered; there was even a little work on *The Getting of Wisdom*. In the Poetry Section *Touched with Fire* was the most popular. There was a limited amount of work on the Coleridge selection but more on *Poems Deep and Dangerous*. In the Prose Section Desai featured prominently, perhaps because of the novel's comparative brevity and straightforwardness. However, as was suggested last year, this was not always a simple advantage to candidates. Certainly, there was much rewarding and accurate work at all levels on this novel but occasionally Examiners wondered whether able candidates found it a struggle to signal their superior qualities of insight. The work, and not just at the higher levels, which tends to stick in Examiners' minds more often comes from more complex texts and this was the case in this year's examinations. Certainly the stimulation afforded by Dickens, Greene, to name but two, was often evident in the responses. There was not as yet much work on *The Siege* but what there was boded well for the future. Again, as last year there was no overwhelmingly popular drama text. Examiners met a lot of work on *Macbeth*, some of it very good indeed but Williams and Shaw also featured strongly and it was not unusual to come across engaged work on the Ayckbourn and the Lochhead/Moxley duo.

As to the question paper, it seemed to have worked well. As always, it is difficult to assign blame in those few areas where the resulting work was rather disappointing. Last year there was some discussion regarding candidates who interpreted *moving* in its most literal sense. There was little evidence of that this year, perhaps because the word was linked in the task with another word which made the intention clear. In **Question 4 Background Material** defeated a number of candidates' attempts at even basic explication. Perhaps, the tendency of some candidates to fly to the 'refuge' of the starred question compounded the problems but it has to be said that tasks which required analysis of allusive poems proved difficult for candidates. Other problems, however, could be blamed on plain mis-reading. It was really difficult to see why a number of candidates in **Question 14** chose to centre their answers on Pip's personality after his receiving money, unless, of course, they were keen to re-work a class essay and couldn't think of much to say about the early part of the novel.

However, most candidates had clearly read their texts with attention, most attended to the question and attempted to answer it in a direct fashion. Following on from what was said last year, it was noticeable this year that fewer candidates wasted time with long empty introductions which did little more than simply repeat at length the things the question asked them to consider. Perhaps the chosen extracts this year were particularly enticing but whatever the reason Examiners noted that the starred questions were the most popular choice. Quite often they were done impressively. Gone are the days when candidates seemed to think that the extract was merely the peg upon which to hang the semi-prepared essay on the whole text. The ability to tease out of the extract significant detail is now quite widespread, and many candidates showed at least the desire to engage with the language and to analyse how it creates its effects. As regards the more discursive tasks, there was plenty of evidence of the capacity to argue a point as most of these tasks required. It was, for example, quite rare to find an answer to **Question 38** which simply gave a character sketch of Lady Macbeth. There were some outstanding empathic answers this year as well and very few which failed utterly to convey appropriate things for the character to say. Of course, in this kind of task one is rather dependent upon the power of the original writing. There was much competent work, for instance, on the father in **Question 12** and on GaoLing in **Question 26**, but Examiners thought some assumptions of Aunt Augusta, the hitchhiker and Dick Dudgeon reached another plane altogether and were a joy to read.

Of course, Examiners saw some work of much more limited scope. If one has to pick out an area of particular problems, then once again it has to be in the genre of poetry. Of course, there was a great deal of good work in this genre, probably more than in recent years, but it was a sharp differentiator and there were

still rather too many Centres where the poorest mark on the script was consistently for the poet. As has already been suggested, perhaps this year there were one or two poems whose meanings were too allusive for some candidates to pick up. Certainly, these poems proved disastrous choices for those who had not studied them in any detail. Some candidates seemed to be labouring under the delusion that because a poem was on the exam paper and was short, something could be made of it there and then in the exam room without previous study. Conversely, where poems had clearly been studied, complex poems were often handled with confidence. This was the first year, for instance, where Examiners read a tranche of good work on *To His Coy Mistress*.

Other problems surfaced in regard to the way poetry was approached. In some Centres, paraphrase without analysis is still the preferred way to deal with a poem and in addition it still needs to be emphasised that the noting of poetic devices and the simple assertion of their power gains little reward. Candidates are expected to show how the words cast their spell. At the other end of the spectrum, just occasionally Examiners came across work in all genres where the drive to write about features of the language became so extreme that the candidates saw no need to expound the basic meanings of the text. Thus the Examiner could find no evidence that the authorial purposes had been understood by the candidate. This approach could also be found in the other genres. One Examiner came across work in which candidates seemed more concerned about noting what they had been told were semantic fields than engaging with literature. Literary terminology can be a useful tool but is more often a bad master.

It has been mentioned above that the starred questions were hugely popular and hence they were an accurate reflection of the ability range. It follows that Examiners met familiar patterns of failure. As usual, most common of these failures was inattention to the detail of the extract. However, the great majority now do recognise that to centre the answer on the extract is a major imperative. As was said last year, the problem now is to get the balance right between this and showing awareness of the context in which the passage occurs. There is no magic formula for arrival at this balance since the context is more important to the understanding of some extracts than to others. In **Question's 28 and 31**, for instance, it could not be of much importance. Conversely, in **Question's 13,16,19,25 and 37** a placing of the passage in its context was crucial for a proper understanding and rather often this was not forthcoming.

Given the huge popularity of the extract tasks, it might be asked whether sometimes this was a choice from weakness rather than strength in that a number of candidates were not very well equipped to cope with more discursive questions or, perhaps more pertinently, did not know enough about material which were not at the absolute Centre of the text. Hence, questions which required candidates to first of all show knowledge of the text by choosing a part of the text relevant to the task were often avoided, as were those on supposedly minor characters. As a consequence, the rich opportunities for lively writing on characters such as Pumblechook and Burgoyne were largely eschewed.

Drama is still being treated by some candidates as something that is read like prose fiction. Hence, questions which require some imaginative engagement with stage spectacle tend to perplex candidates. One realises that the chance to see drama in the flesh is very limited but these days video and DVD offer in some instances an alternative, as does deliberate encouragement of candidates to visualise what is happening on the stage. The most extreme and bizarre example of the failure to do this is found in the way some candidates think stage directions work. There were rather too many candidates who think that copying out what a playwright indicates to the actors about a character is answering a question which requires the candidate to explore the character through action and dialogue, in other words as the audience sees that character on the stage. There are even a few who write about stage directions as if they are part of the dramatic experience of the audience and hence proceed to explore them as a piece of prose writing in a novel.

Other old familiar difficulties continued to be noted by Examiners. Whilst it is now quite rare for candidates to pay no attention to the question, some candidates simply did not pay sufficient attention to the wording of the task. **Question 14** has already been mentioned but there were others. *Ode to Autumn* was sometimes written about without any reference to *joy and pleasure*, sometimes no attempt was made to explore the *complexity* of the mother/daughter relationship in **Question 26**, occasionally in the Greene task no attention was given to the need to explore the humour of the novel. Just occasionally in the empathic tasks, Examiners encountered flights of fancy quite unconnected with anything that the text suggested was possible. As has been said, some characters presented problems of voice which were more difficult to solve than others. Examiners could be charitable towards that but such charity was hardly appropriate in answers which suggested, for instance, a Duncan deeply suspicious of Macbeth or a Dick Dudgeon pondering on what his love life with Judith might have been were he not about to be hung.

Lastly, there were gratifyingly few rubric infringements. However, they still at times occur in patches. One Examiner wondered rather alarmingly whether a few candidates thought that the requirement to write on a passage-based task was fulfilled simply by writing on one poem from the Poetry Section. It is to be hoped this is not the case.

In summary then, the Examiners found the majority of the work praiseworthy, a continuing tribute to the quality of teaching in IGCSE Schools. There follows some question specific comment :

## POETRY

### Coleridge

Only a few Centres seemed to have offered these poems. However, those that did produced work which was quite often of high quality. Clearly the candidates for the most part relished the imaginative possibilities which Coleridge's poetic world offered them. In the main they responded to the fanciful mysteries of all three poems featured with work that was detailed and insightful. Occasionally, though, imposition of 'meanings' tended to inhibit exploration of the varied possibilities of the poetic language.

### Poems Deep and Dangerous

The difficulties candidates encountered with *Background Material* have already been mentioned. In some answers there was very little attempt to probe the nature of the poet's memories of his parents and very little understanding of the detail. For example, the mother's photograph was not taken at her wedding. Where the poem had been prepared, there was some more successful probing of the poem's possibilities, particularly the way the image of the son unites the two photographs. In **Question 5**, again, the precise background of the Larkin eluded many. The Soyinka was done more successfully, though Examiners noted how many candidates became so righteous about the racism in the poem that they missed Soyinka's rueful humour completely. Those who essayed the Keats, however, often did so with conspicuous success, bringing out the poem's bleak mysteries very well. Most who answered **Question 6** wrote about *Bogymán* but, as in past years, Examiners found understanding sometimes limited. In this question the ending of the poem was a crucial element and was often barely grasped or simply ignored. There was very rarely any real response to the poetry.

### Touched with Fire

Most Examiners found that the Marvell had been well prepared and few answers did not have some basic understanding of the poem's point. Of course, an engagement with the progress of the imagery and the change of tone as the poem progresses was only communicated by the more able. There was also quite a lot of evidence of engagement in **Questions 8** and **9**. In the former, the Frost proved difficult for a number but not apparently for others. There was some delicate enjoyment of the Keats and of the Thomas. **Question 9** was usually done at least competently but often candidates ignored the word *powerfully* in the question and were content just to elucidate the poem's argument. This was particularly the case in regard to the McNeice. Surprisingly and, despite the explicit phrasing of the question, the point of Betjeman's satire was sometimes not made clear. Some managed to suggest that he was criticising rodents and even those who did make the link with humans explicit failed to see that the 'voice' of the poem was being satirised as well. Sadly, few relished the poem's wit. Some, misreading *the voice of my education*, thought that the protagonist of *Snake* was a child.

## PROSE

### Village by the Sea

A majority did **Question 10** and there were few who did it less than competently. Most were able to pinpoint examples of the De Silva's good works. However, very often important details escaped the broad brush approach. Many saw no difference in personality between husband and wife. The responses to **Question 11** were in the main competent but Examiners found little of real insight. For instance, it was noticeable that most were content to write more about the difficulties than the happiness of the family. There were a significant number of empathic answers. Perhaps this was because appropriate content was hardly difficult to create. However, the father's voice proved more elusive and this may have slightly limited the range of reward.

### Great Expectations

**Question 13** was the popular choice and proved to be a good discriminator. There was much evidence of a good knowledge of the context, though occasionally a candidate would seem to think that Magwitch had stolen the pie. Quite a few candidates were able to engage with the language to an impressive degree, probing the dramatic power of, for instance, the final part of the extract. **Question 14** was not quite so well done. As has already been said, some did not seem to think that they had to write in any detail about the early part of the novel. A number did so very well, however, bringing out some of the most memorable features of Pip's unhappiness. There were also, though, perceptive accounts of the moments of pleasure and comparative innocence, in which candidates drew pertinent parallels with the world Pip would later enter. Surprisingly, given the rich possibilities of Pumblechook's personality, few attempted **Question 15**. However, those that did rarely failed to create something that was recognisably the character, whilst a few had him down to the last syllable.

### The Siege

**Question 16** was a good example of an extract task which required an understanding of the context. Those who recognised that this was before the siege, of course, recognised the real poignancy of this moment. Times are hard but much worse is to come did Anna but know it. A number of answers were able to make much of the writing in this context. Not so, alas, those who did not know the novel well enough. **Question 17** did not demand such intimate knowledge of detail and hence the answers were more uniformly competent, though too many ignored the ways by which Dunmore makes Anna *memorable*. Most candidates who attempted an assumption of Pavlov at least knew what constituted apt material and some captured quite convincingly the voice of this apparatchick. Others gave him much too much emotion.

### Travels with My Aunt

The responses to the extract were very variable. Some engaged well with what made the passage amusing and elucidated its importance in the development of Henry and Augusta's relationship. However, quite a few did not seem to realise what had been her profession and that Augusta was actually Henry's mother, hence quite missing the piquancy of the moment. Some also virtually ignored the opening part of the extract and thus again missed a crucial part of the reason for Augusta's outburst. **Question 20** had few takers but the empathic task was popular and often well done. Here again, though, there was the suspicion that some thought Augusta was Henry's Aunt.

### The Getting of Wisdom

Sadly there were still too few answers on this text for there to be any meaningful general comment about the quality of work.



### The Bonesetter's Daughter

Most candidates in **Question 25**, the most popular of the tasks, managed to pick out some features from the extract which were generally relevant to Ruth's personality in the novel. Some, though, simply thought Ruth was to be busy and did not seem to see her obsessive need to get her life under control. This task over the novel required fairly delicate balancing between extract and novel and some managed this very well. However, others simply used the extract as an excuse to move at length into the rest of the novel. Even some of those who made the extract their chief focus left out important things in it. Art, for instance, and even Luling were sometimes ignored. In **Question 26** the choice of incident was overwhelmingly and appropriately that which caused Luling's attempted suicide, though the playground incident also featured. Examiners also allowed the incident which caused the death of Precious Auntie, though, of course at that time Luling did not know who was her true mother. The weakness of some answers was that they did not bring out the complexity of the relationship in detail, being simply content to describe the incident. In **Question 27** most of the assumptions competently hit upon apt material of an up-beat nature, the escape from China and her husband figuring prominently. However, some made it rather too much so, ignoring such things as GaoLing's possible feelings of guilt concerning her sister and her concerns for Miss Grutoff.

### Into the Wind

Again the great majority did the extract task and often did it well. Most candidates recognised the imperative of engaging with the detail of the writing and attempted to do just that. Quite a few were very good at tracing how minor details develop the tension until there is a real sense of general menace. The obverse of this were candidates who simply mentioned the emerging racial aspect of the scene and left it at that. As always with this kind of task, Examiners were asked to see menace in rather unlikely things, such as the bitter sweet characteristics of lemons. **Question 29** was much less popular but candidates had no difficulty in finding appropriate stories about which to write and bring out the drama of change, though, perhaps because of the task's nature, some candidates found it difficult to avoid extensive narration. There were a few astounding assumptions of the hitchhiker which to Examiners' delight captured all of the man's perky outrageousness. Conversely, some showed that candidates had the shakiest knowledge of the story, for instance creating a personality who was both apprehensive and apologetic for what he had done.

## DRAMA

### Absent Friends

The work on this play was as ever variable. In **Question 31** some candidates responded in a lively manner to the irony at work and reacted well to the differences already apparent between Diana and Evelyn. Others, however, became locked into a description of the setting or writing about the scene completely from hindsight and hence really ignoring the way the playwright goes to work on his audience. **Question 32** was not popular and, whilst some showed again a good grasp of how a scene gained dramatically from the audience's superior knowledge, too many were vague and discursive. **Question 33** was better done, quite a few capturing John's fidgety personality and his priorities in life, like his thinking he has just brought off the most fantastic deal. However, others showed minimal grasp of detail by having him, for instance, looking forward with eager anticipation to the party.

### Cuba and Doghouse

**Question 36** was the most popular here and was often done with passion. Candidates clearly identified strongly with this boy's sense of outrage at the abuse which had been visited upon the family. Some of the best answers had a splendid streak of quite adult sardonic dismissal of father and dog, whilst also preserving a sense of the vulnerability of the young person. The other questions were not quite so well done. It would appear that, once candidates are asked to move away from the central relationship in *Cuba*, they begin to struggle. **Question 34** was approached more often as something to be read rather than viewed, with little attempt to imagine how such things as the opening spectacle might work upon an audience and in **Question 35** it was noticeable that those who used *Doghouse* found it easier to focus on relevant material and often did so with much more encouraging results than in the companion play.

## Macbeth

All the questions had a significant number of answers. The extract task saw some penetrating exploration of Macbeth's state of mind, bringing out well his rapid mood swings and even occasionally looking in detail at the dramatic power of the verse. However, sometimes there was a sense of mild disappointment at the scope of the answers from some Centres. These often failed to place Macbeth in any kind of context, seeing how Shakespeare clearly wishes his audience to relate the soliloquy to the Macbeth of previous times. They often completely missed the sense of desperation evident even at the beginning of the extract and some also mis-read his reaction to the death of his wife. The standard of responses to **Question 38** was less variable. The great majority pleasingly addressed the parameters of the question directly and most were able to give some account of her monstrous qualities with support. They struggled rather more when it came to suggesting her wifely qualities, being content to give her a pat on the back for sticking by Macbeth after the murder, without quite asking themselves what would have been the alternative at such a juncture. The best candidates tended to be those who saw how the alternatives were often sides of the same coin, that what made her monstrous at times also suggested the ends to which she was prepared to go for her husband and what damage that in the end did to her. The empathic task was well done in the main. The material was usually apt and most captured with some irony Duncan's trusting nature and his euphoria at the performance of his 'loyal' kinsman. However, not even Duncan would have entered Inverness with the suspicions some candidates gave him.

## The Devil's Disciple

Candidates performed rather variably on this play. The extract question was usually done with some efficiency, occasionally rather better than that. Answers tended, though, to concentrate on Mrs. Dudgeon and quite often even there just reduced her to a nasty, bitter old woman for whom no-one could have any sympathy. A few totally mis-read Anderson, accepting the truth of Mrs. Dudgeon's judgement and seeing him as an aggressive hypocrite. **Question 41** was rarely attempted and only a few seemed able to relish Burgoyne's wit. Some candidates seemed to think that stage directions could do their work for them. In **Question 42**, quite a few made a good attempt to capture Dick's character, conveying quite well his mixture of insouciance and passion. Others, though, invested him with a love for Judith or a degree of breast beating quite foreign to the character.

## A Street Car Named Desire

Examiners found much commendable work on this play. Many read a significant number of answers which indicated considerable engagement with the characters and the issues as well as the ability to write confidently about Williams' skill as a playwright. This was particularly in evidence in **Question 43** where many managed to probe the language Blanche uses to describe Stanley, the tension created by the audience's awareness that it is all being overheard and the significance of music and train. Weaker answers, however, often almost ignored Blanche's speech, did not seem to realise that Stanley was listening and tended to drift away to generalities about the dramatic action as a whole outside the extract. In **Question 44** there was a great deal of insight shown into the relationship Stella had with Stanley. Some managed to probe its complex contradictions very well indeed, with detailed support from moments in the play. Conversely, in some instances the task became converted into more a character sketch of Stanley and in others a few candidates failed to confront in any way the central role that sex played in the relationship. Again, as through the paper as a whole, Examiners were pleased with the quality of the answers to the empathic task. One or two expressed surprise that this was so in regard to the character of Mitch who is perhaps not one of the most instantly memorable characters in the play. However, perhaps it is a tribute to the playwright that so many were able to make something of Mitch's innocence and essential decency.

# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/02  
Coursework

## General comments

As usual, every Centre will receive a short report on its coursework from the external Moderator. From a reading of these reports, it becomes quite clear that in the vast majority of cases Moderators were extremely impressed with the care that Centres had taken over the internal moderation. Folders were usually presented well. The external Moderator was often given all the information necessary, including for the most part detailed comments on the criteria which had led to the award of the Folder's mark and grade in the *Teacher Comment* Section on the Individual Candidate Record Card. There are, however, Centres who still do not fulfil this requirement. It is now rare to find nothing in this section but still rather too common to find one or two cursory sentences that relate little to the Syllabus criteria, sometimes even informing the external Moderator about the personal characteristics of the candidate rather than the quality of the folder he or she has produced. When there is little or nothing in the section, and, as happened on one or two occasions, little or no annotation on essays, the Centre is not clarifying its judgment. Coursework assessment should be ideally a collaborative exercise; but it takes two parties to collaborate.

In last year's report it was emphasised that annotation of essays was a requirement so that the work is seen to have been validated by the teacher as the candidate's own. There are still too many Centres ignoring this requirement. Perhaps it comes from the mistaken but understandable belief of both candidate and teacher that in the presentation of a folder fair copies rather than annotated essays will make a better impression on the external Moderator. In fact, external Moderators like to see helpful teacher annotation.

As to the work presented in the folders, Moderators continue to be impressed by the range of work and the diligence it represents. There are clearly a number of approaches to coursework, no doubt in part arising from the varying conditions in the Centres. In some Centres Moderators found candidates all writing on the same texts, often with identical tasks. In others, more freedom had clearly been given to candidates to follow their own paths both in regard to text and to subject. The latter is closer to the ideal of coursework but, of course, is not always a realistic option. There are also sound educational reasons for taking the opportunity to introduce candidates to texts which have been on past syllabuses.

However, what is a necessity in any circumstance is for the candidate to have a properly focused task set, one which will open up the possibility of the candidate meeting all the criteria. Moderators still feel that some candidates were being impeded by inappropriate tasks.

Tasks continue to be set which entirely concentrate upon such things as theme and character and do not encourage the candidate to explore how the writer's language makes the material effective and memorable. The attainment of top grades hinges on such engagement. Once again, Moderators noted how comparative tasks often seemed to prove a major impediment to such engagement. There may, of course, be areas where there is some validity to a comparison but it is likely to be in the most obvious area of content. To expect candidates of this age to make searching comparisons of style almost always results in candidates wasting time making simplistic comments and failing to probe the unique features of each poem. They are much more likely to do the latter well if relieved of the burden of having to make constant attempts to compare and contrast.

Empathic work is becoming increasingly popular. This is good news. The leap of imagination such an approach requires can stimulate some candidates to write with an insight and commitment not found in their more traditional essay writing. However, as has been said before, in order to satisfy the Syllabus criteria, the greatest care is needed in formulating empathic tasks. In order to show understanding of the text, its characters, themes and language, the candidate must be asked to assume a character with a defined voice in the text and in a plausible situation and context arising out of the action. That way the candidate can enter the writer's world. That can hardly happen, for instance, in such a thing as a straightforward newspaper report which almost always lapses into narrative, with, of course, no assumed voice from the text at the Centre of the narrative. For proper stimulation, it is important to ask oneself often quite simple questions

when framing an empathic task. Diary entries and letters may be an appropriate template in some cases. However, if the situation in the text does not make such a mode of communication plausible, the candidate is being pushed into invention at odds with the text and will struggle to show his or her connection with its world.

**Teachers are reminded of the revised coursework requirements for 2007 onwards. Please see the syllabus booklet for further details.**



# LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

Paper 0486/03  
Alternative to Coursework

## General comments

The question on the extract from Tom Wolfe's novel, *A Man in Full*, was designed to examine how well candidates were able to respond to the tone of a piece of writing. It was with great pleasure that Examiners realised that many candidates were actually using the word, "tone", in their discourses in spite of the fact that the word was not specifically used in the question paper. Such technical awareness was not essential, of course, and many candidates, without using the term, showed that they could engage with the humour of the passage, while explaining how the way Wolfe had written the piece encouraged them to sympathise with Conrad.

One or two stolidly expressed their view that such an incident was no laughing matter. This was their prerogative, although, if they had explored rather more precisely the targets of the humour, they may have reached a different conclusion. There were few misunderstandings of the question. A few candidates interpreted the "amusing" in the question as applicable only to the amusement of the bystanders to the events before them. A minority also thought that probably Conrad really *had* parked in the red zone and was ineptly lying to escape trouble. Candidates should trust the plain truth of the opening sentences contextualising the piece which in this case said quite clearly that he had parked *near* the red zone. While this erroneous interpretation did not lead automatically to reduced marks, it was not allowable.

However, most candidates knew exactly what they had to do and clearly enjoyed the passage. Many were happier explaining why they felt sorry for Conrad than showing why they felt it amusing, mainly because they were less familiar with the tools required for the latter task. Weaker candidates resorted to narrative to explain their answers to the two questions. Typically, such answers selected details from the story which they found evoked pity or laughter and strung them together to form a narrative without explanatory commentary. Unfortunately, it was often difficult to see exactly why they had chosen the details they did. Examiners often read that the candidate found it hilarious that Conrad was upset or that the meter-maid was rude to him and one had to ask – why? Better were the narratives, which were written so creatively that it was obvious why their writers found the situation amusing or pathetic. The Examiners warmed to these lively and imaginative responses, of which there were more than usual, this year. While in the best answers, Examiners are looking for analytical skills, they are also looking for engagement with writing, however this is demonstrated, and one of the ways it can be demonstrated is by the colourful way the candidate writes about the extract. Such engagement was to be found in this section of a candidate's answer. It demonstrated surely that Wolfe has struck a chord with this reader, at least:

"It's a sad thing when you're trying to be heard but no one really listens, when your pain provides jeers for distant observers, when you feel as though there is not a single person on your side of the fence."

There were many perceptive comments on the meter-maid and the tow-truck driver. Many enjoyed the humour in their portrayal and, interestingly enough, there seemed to be an almost universal, instant recognition of this type of petty official. Very many candidates indignantly commented on the meter-maid's use of the word, *transmitting*, and, while some candidates thought that her attempt at humour later in the piece was funny, the more aware said that it was such a ludicrously obvious ploy to endear herself to the mob that it just added to their poor opinion of her. The Chinese-red press-on nails occupied the minds of most candidates also. Some saw the red as meaning danger and, with limited success, followed that line of enquiry. More successful were those who did not seek for symbolism but took them for what they were, as in this example: "it gives her a rather lurid and trashy appearance that Wolfe seeks gleefully to contrast with her uniform and walkie-talkie, her signs of authority".

Ultimately, the key to understanding how the writer makes you feel sympathy with Conrad and amusing at the same time lies in an exploration of the way the incident is narrated. Many dealt in a superficial way with the final bullet point which tried to point candidates to this important area of enquiry. Some did not move beyond being unable to move further than saying that it was a third person narrative with little relevant comment on how this affected the reader's sympathy for Conrad or amusement at the passage. More responsive readers were able to explore the syntax, for example, of the second paragraph to show how the way the story was told allowed us to share in Conrad's shock as he discovered it was *his* precious car which was the Centre of attention. They elaborated on the use of short sentences, exclamation, the repetition of the possessive adjective, *his*, the cute use of the word "little", as though speaking of a pet. They then perceived that this was not a detached third person narrative; it was partially told from Conrad's point of view, but also, with a lightness of tone, created by the comic exaggerations and expressions which are peppered throughout the narrative.

If candidates sequentially followed the bullet points in this paper, they were likely to progress from the lower skills of literary appreciation to the higher skills. As intimated before, many candidates spent an inordinate amount of time on their response to the situation alone with the prompt of the first bullet point. Candidates, in the future, might be warned against this. They should also be aware that it is often better not to follow these pointers sequentially. Perhaps the way for above-average candidates is, within their preparation time, firstly to make a skeleton plan to the set question *without* reference to the bullet points, and then to check whether there is any major aspect of the question which reference to the bullet points suggest they might have omitted and to modify their plan accordingly before writing their final answer. In the case of this year's paper, the best answers maintained a focus on the way the incident was narrated throughout their whole discourse. They appreciated, in short, the essential nature of literary study.

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Paper 0486/04

Paper 1 (Open Books)

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There was a great deal of work at all levels which was refreshingly lively. It is, perhaps, as well to remember how important pleasure should be in this area of the curriculum.

Like last year, most of the texts were covered; there was even a little work on *The Getting of Wisdom*. In the Poetry Section *Touched with Fire* was the most popular. There was a limited amount of work on the Coleridge selection but more on *Poems Deep and Dangerous*. In the Prose Section Desai featured prominently, perhaps because of the novel's comparative brevity and straightforwardness. However, as was suggested last year, this was not always a simple advantage to candidates. Certainly, there was much rewarding and accurate work at all levels on this novel but occasionally Examiners wondered whether able candidates found it a struggle to signal their superior qualities of insight. The work, and not just at the higher levels, which tends to stick in Examiners' minds more often comes from more complex texts and this was the case in this year's examinations. Certainly the stimulation afforded by Dickens, Greene, to name but two, was often evident in the responses. There was not as yet much work on *The Siege* but what there was boded well for the future. Again, as last year there was no overwhelmingly popular drama text. Examiners met a lot of work on *Macbeth*, some of it very good indeed but Williams and Shaw also featured strongly and it was not unusual to come across engaged work on the Ayckbourn and the Lochhead/Moxley duo.

As to the question paper, it seemed to have worked well. As always, it is difficult to assign blame in those few areas where the resulting work was rather disappointing. Last year there was some discussion regarding candidates who interpreted *moving* in its most literal sense. There was little evidence of that this year, perhaps because the word was linked in the task with another word which made the intention clear. In **Question 4 Background Material** defeated a number of candidates' attempts at even basic explication. Perhaps, the tendency of some candidates to fly to the 'refuge' of the starred question compounded the problems but it has to be said that tasks which required analysis of allusive poems proved difficult for candidates. Other problems, however, could be blamed on plain mis-reading. It was really difficult to see why a number of candidates in **Question 14** chose to centre their answers on Pip's personality after his receiving money, unless, of course, they were keen to re-work a class essay and couldn't think of much to say about the early part of the novel.

However, most candidates had clearly read their texts with attention, most attended to the question and attempted to answer it in a direct fashion. Following on from what was said last year, it was noticeable this year that fewer candidates wasted time with long empty introductions which did little more than simply repeat at length the things the question asked them to consider. Perhaps the chosen extracts this year were particularly enticing but whatever the reason Examiners noted that the starred questions were the most popular choice. Quite often they were done impressively. Gone are the days when candidates seemed to think that the extract was merely the peg upon which to hang the semi-prepared essay on the whole text. The ability to tease out of the extract significant detail is now quite widespread, and many candidates showed at least the desire to engage with the language and to analyse how it creates its effects. As regards the more discursive tasks, there was plenty of evidence of the capacity to argue a point as most of these tasks required. It was, for example, quite rare to find an answer to **Question 38** which simply gave a character sketch of Lady Macbeth. There were some outstanding empathic answers this year as well and very few which failed utterly to convey appropriate things for the character to say. Of course, in this kind of task one is rather dependent upon the power of the original writing. There was much competent work, for instance, on the father in **Question 12** and on GaoLing in **Question 26**, but Examiners thought some assumptions of Aunt Augusta, the hitchhiker and Dick Dudgeon reached another plane altogether and were a joy to read.

Of course, Examiners saw some work of much more limited scope. If one has to pick out an area of particular problems, then once again it has to be in the genre of poetry. Of course, there was a great deal of good work in this genre, probably more than in recent years, but it was a sharp differentiator and there were

still rather too many Centres where the poorest mark on the script was consistently for the poet. As has already been suggested, perhaps this year there were one or two poems whose meanings were too allusive for some candidates to pick up. Certainly, these poems proved disastrous choices for those who had not studied them in any detail. Some candidates seemed to be labouring under the delusion that because a poem was on the exam paper and was short, something could be made of it there and then in the exam room without previous study. Conversely, where poems had clearly been studied, complex poems were often handled with confidence. This was the first year, for instance, where Examiners read a tranche of good work on *To His Coy Mistress*.

Other problems surfaced in regard to the way poetry was approached. In some Centres, paraphrase without analysis is still the preferred way to deal with a poem and in addition it still needs to be emphasised that the noting of poetic devices and the simple assertion of their power gains little reward. Candidates are expected to show how the words cast their spell. At the other end of the spectrum, just occasionally Examiners came across work in all genres where the drive to write about features of the language became so extreme that the candidates saw no need to expound the basic meanings of the text. Thus the Examiner could find no evidence that the authorial purposes had been understood by the candidate. This approach could also be found in the other genres. One Examiner came across work in which candidates seemed more concerned about noting what they had been told were semantic fields than engaging with literature. Literary terminology can be a useful tool but is more often a bad master.

It has been mentioned above that the starred questions were hugely popular and hence they were an accurate reflection of the ability range. It follows that Examiners met familiar patterns of failure. As usual, most common of these failures was inattention to the detail of the extract. However, the great majority now do recognise that to centre the answer on the extract is a major imperative. As was said last year, the problem now is to get the balance right between this and showing awareness of the context in which the passage occurs. There is no magic formula for arrival at this balance since the context is more important to the understanding of some extracts than to others. In **Question's 28 and 31**, for instance, it could not be of much importance. Conversely, in **Question's 13,16,19,25 and 37** a placing of the passage in its context was crucial for a proper understanding and rather often this was not forthcoming.

Given the huge popularity of the extract tasks, it might be asked whether sometimes this was a choice from weakness rather than strength in that a number of candidates were not very well equipped to cope with more discursive questions or, perhaps more pertinently, did not know enough about material which were not at the absolute Centre of the text. Hence, questions which required candidates to first of all show knowledge of the text by choosing a part of the text relevant to the task were often avoided, as were those on supposedly minor characters. As a consequence, the rich opportunities for lively writing on characters such as Pumblechook and Burgoyne were largely eschewed.

Drama is still being treated by some candidates as something that is read like prose fiction. Hence, questions which require some imaginative engagement with stage spectacle tend to perplex candidates. One realises that the chance to see drama in the flesh is very limited but these days video and DVD offer in some instances an alternative, as does deliberate encouragement of candidates to visualise what is happening on the stage. The most extreme and bizarre example of the failure to do this is found in the way some candidates think stage directions work. There were rather too many candidates who think that copying out what a playwright indicates to the actors about a character is answering a question which requires the candidate to explore the character through action and dialogue, in other words as the audience sees that character on the stage. There are even a few who write about stage directions as if they are part of the dramatic experience of the audience and hence proceed to explore them as a piece of prose writing in a novel.

Other old familiar difficulties continued to be noted by Examiners. Whilst it is now quite rare for candidates to pay no attention to the question, some candidates simply did not pay sufficient attention to the wording of the task. **Question 14** has already been mentioned but there were others. *Ode to Autumn* was sometimes written about without any reference to *joy and pleasure*, sometimes no attempt was made to explore the *complexity* of the mother/daughter relationship in **Question 26**, occasionally in the Greene task no attention was given to the need to explore the humour of the novel. Just occasionally in the empathic tasks, Examiners encountered flights of fancy quite unconnected with anything that the text suggested was possible. As has been said, some characters presented problems of voice which were more difficult to solve than others. Examiners could be charitable towards that but such charity was hardly appropriate in answers which suggested, for instance, a Duncan deeply suspicious of Macbeth or a Dick Dudgeon pondering on what his love life with Judith might have been were he not about to be hung.

Lastly, there were gratifyingly few rubric infringements. However, they still at times occur in patches. One Examiner wondered rather alarmingly whether a few candidates thought that the requirement to write on a passage-based task was fulfilled simply by writing on one poem from the Poetry Section. It is to be hoped this is not the case.

In summary then, the Examiners found the majority of the work praiseworthy, a continuing tribute to the quality of teaching in IGCSE Schools. There follows some question specific comment :

## POETRY

### Coleridge

Only a few Centres seemed to have offered these poems. However, those that did produced work which was quite often of high quality. Clearly the candidates for the most part relished the imaginative possibilities which Coleridge's poetic world offered them. In the main they responded to the fanciful mysteries of all three poems featured with work that was detailed and insightful. Occasionally, though, imposition of 'meanings' tended to inhibit exploration of the varied possibilities of the poetic language.

### Poems Deep and Dangerous

The difficulties candidates encountered with *Background Material* have already been mentioned. In some answers there was very little attempt to probe the nature of the poet's memories of his parents and very little understanding of the detail. For example, the mother's photograph was not taken at her wedding. Where the poem had been prepared, there was some more successful probing of the poem's possibilities, particularly the way the image of the son unites the two photographs. In **Question 5**, again, the precise background of the Larkin eluded many. The Soyinka was done more successfully, though Examiners noted how many candidates became so righteous about the racism in the poem that they missed Soyinka's rueful humour completely. Those who essayed the Keats, however, often did so with conspicuous success, bringing out the poem's bleak mysteries very well. Most who answered **Question 6** wrote about *Bogymán* but, as in past years, Examiners found understanding sometimes limited. In this question the ending of the poem was a crucial element and was often barely grasped or simply ignored. There was very rarely any real response to the poetry.

### Touched with Fire

Most Examiners found that the Marvell had been well prepared and few answers did not have some basic understanding of the poem's point. Of course, an engagement with the progress of the imagery and the change of tone as the poem progresses was only communicated by the more able. There was also quite a lot of evidence of engagement in **Questions 8** and **9**. In the former, the Frost proved difficult for a number but not apparently for others. There was some delicate enjoyment of the Keats and of the Thomas. **Question 9** was usually done at least competently but often candidates ignored the word *powerfully* in the question and were content just to elucidate the poem's argument. This was particularly the case in regard to the McNeice. Surprisingly and, despite the explicit phrasing of the question, the point of Betjeman's satire was sometimes not made clear. Some managed to suggest that he was criticising rodents and even those who did make the link with humans explicit failed to see that the 'voice' of the poem was being satirised as well. Sadly, few relished the poem's wit. Some, misreading *the voice of my education*, thought that the protagonist of *Snake* was a child.



## PROSE

### Village by the Sea

A majority did **Question 10** and there were few who did it less than competently. Most were able to pinpoint examples of the De Silva's good works. However, very often important details escaped the broad brush approach. Many saw no difference in personality between husband and wife. The responses to **Question 11** were in the main competent but Examiners found little of real insight. For instance, it was noticeable that most were content to write more about the difficulties than the happiness of the family. There were a significant number of empathic answers. Perhaps this was because appropriate content was hardly difficult to create. However, the father's voice proved more elusive and this may have slightly limited the range of reward.

### Great Expectations

**Question 13** was the popular choice and proved to be a good discriminator. There was much evidence of a good knowledge of the context, though occasionally a candidate would seem to think that Magwitch had stolen the pie. Quite a few candidates were able to engage with the language to an impressive degree, probing the dramatic power of, for instance, the final part of the extract. **Question 14** was not quite so well done. As has already been said, some did not seem to think that they had to write in any detail about the early part of the novel. A number did so very well, however, bringing out some of the most memorable features of Pip's unhappiness. There were also, though, perceptive accounts of the moments of pleasure and comparative innocence, in which candidates drew pertinent parallels with the world Pip would later enter. Surprisingly, given the rich possibilities of Pumblechook's personality, few attempted **Question 15**. However, those that did rarely failed to create something that was recognisably the character, whilst a few had him down to the last syllable.

### The Siege

**Question 16** was a good example of an extract task which required an understanding of the context. Those who recognised that this was before the siege, of course, recognised the real poignancy of this moment. Times are hard but much worse is to come did Anna but know it. A number of answers were able to make much of the writing in this context. Not so, alas, those who did not know the novel well enough. **Question 17** did not demand such intimate knowledge of detail and hence the answers were more uniformly competent, though too many ignored the ways by which Dunmore makes Anna *memorable*. Most candidates who attempted an assumption of Pavlov at least knew what constituted apt material and some captured quite convincingly the voice of this apparatchick. Others gave him much too much emotion.

### Travels with My Aunt

The responses to the extract were very variable. Some engaged well with what made the passage amusing and elucidated its importance in the development of Henry and Augusta's relationship. However, quite a few did not seem to realise what had been her profession and that Augusta was actually Henry's mother, hence quite missing the piquancy of the moment. Some also virtually ignored the opening part of the extract and thus again missed a crucial part of the reason for Augusta's outburst. **Question 20** had few takers but the empathic task was popular and often well done. Here again, though, there was the suspicion that some thought Augusta was Henry's Aunt.

### The Getting of Wisdom

Sadly there were still too few answers on this text for there to be any meaningful general comment about the quality of work.

### The Bonesetter's Daughter

Most candidates in **Question 25**, the most popular of the tasks, managed to pick out some features from the extract which were generally relevant to Ruth's personality in the novel. Some, though, simply thought Ruth was to be busy and did not seem to see her obsessive need to get her life under control. This task over the years required fairly delicate balancing between extract and novel and some managed this very well. However, others simply used the extract as an excuse to move at length into the rest of the novel. Even some of those who made the extract their chief focus left out important things in it. Art, for instance, and even Luling were sometimes ignored. In **Question 26** the choice of incident was overwhelmingly and appropriately that which caused Luling's attempted suicide, though the playground incident also featured. Examiners also allowed the incident which caused the death of Precious Auntie, though, of course at that time Luling did not know who was her true mother. The weakness of some answers was that they did not bring out the complexity of the relationship in detail, being simply content to describe the incident. In **Question 27** most of the assumptions competently hit upon apt material of an up-beat nature, the escape from China and her husband figuring prominently. However, some made it rather too much so, ignoring such things as GaoLing's possible feelings of guilt concerning her sister and her concerns for Miss Grutoff.

### Into the Wind

Again the great majority did the extract task and often did it well. Most candidates recognised the imperative of engaging with the detail of the writing and attempted to do just that. Quite a few were very good at tracing how minor details develop the tension until there is a real sense of general menace. The obverse of this were candidates who simply mentioned the emerging racial aspect of the scene and left it at that. As always with this kind of task, Examiners were asked to see menace in rather unlikely things, such as the bitter sweet characteristics of lemons. **Question 29** was much less popular but candidates had no difficulty in finding appropriate stories about which to write and bring out the drama of change, though, perhaps because of the task's nature, some candidates found it difficult to avoid extensive narration. There were a few astounding assumptions of the hitchhiker which to Examiners' delight captured all of the man's perky outrageousness. Conversely, some showed that candidates had the shakiest knowledge of the story, for instance creating a personality who was both apprehensive and apologetic for what he had done.

## DRAMA

### Absent Friends

The work on this play was as ever variable. In **Question 31** some candidates responded in a lively manner to the irony at work and reacted well to the differences already apparent between Diana and Evelyn. Others, however, became locked into a description of the setting or writing about the scene completely from hindsight and hence really ignoring the way the playwright goes to work on his audience. **Question 32** was not popular and, whilst some showed again a good grasp of how a scene gained dramatically from the audience's superior knowledge, too many were vague and discursive. **Question 33** was better done, quite a few capturing John's fidgety personality and his priorities in life, like his thinking he has just brought off the most fantastic deal. However, others showed minimal grasp of detail by having him, for instance, looking forward with eager anticipation to the party.

### Cuba and Doghouse

**Question 36** was the most popular here and was often done with passion. Candidates clearly identified strongly with this boy's sense of outrage at the abuse which had been visited upon the family. Some of the best answers had a splendid streak of quite adult sardonic dismissal of father and dog, whilst also preserving a sense of the vulnerability of the young person. The other questions were not quite so well done. It would appear that, once candidates are asked to move away from the central relationship in *Cuba*, they begin to struggle. **Question 34** was approached more often as something to be read rather than viewed, with little attempt to imagine how such things as the opening spectacle might work upon an audience and in **Question 35** it was noticeable that those who used *Doghouse* found it easier to focus on relevant material and often did so with much more encouraging results than in the companion play.

## Macbeth

All the questions had a significant number of answers. The extract task saw some penetrating exploration of Macbeth's state of mind, bringing out well his rapid mood swings and even occasionally looking in detail at the dramatic power of the verse. However, sometimes there was a sense of mild disappointment at the scope of the answers from some Centres. These often failed to place Macbeth in any kind of context, seeing how Shakespeare clearly wishes his audience to relate the soliloquy to the Macbeth of previous times. They often completely missed the sense of desperation evident even at the beginning of the extract and some also mis-read his reaction to the death of his wife. The standard of responses to **Question 38** was less variable. The great majority pleasingly addressed the parameters of the question directly and most were able to give some account of her monstrous qualities with support. They struggled rather more when it came to suggesting her wifely qualities, being content to give her a pat on the back for sticking by Macbeth after the murder, without quite asking themselves what would have been the alternative at such a juncture. The best candidates tended to be those who saw how the alternatives were often sides of the same coin, that what made her monstrous at times also suggested the ends to which she was prepared to go for her husband and what damage that in the end did to her. The empathic task was well done in the main. The material was usually apt and most captured with some irony Duncan's trusting nature and his euphoria at the performance of his 'loyal' kinsman. However, not even Duncan would have entered Inverness with the suspicions some candidates gave him.

## The Devil's Disciple

Candidates performed rather variably on this play. The extract question was usually done with some efficiency, occasionally rather better than that. Answers tended, though, to concentrate on Mrs. Dudgeon and quite often even there just reduced her to a nasty, bitter old woman for whom no-one could have any sympathy. A few totally mis-read Anderson, accepting the truth of Mrs. Dudgeon's judgement and seeing him as an aggressive hypocrite. **Question 41** was rarely attempted and only a few seemed able to relish Burgoyne's wit. Some candidates seemed to think that stage directions could do their work for them. In **Question 42**, quite a few made a good attempt to capture Dick's character, conveying quite well his mixture of insouciance and passion. Others, though, invested him with a love for Judith or a degree of breast beating quite foreign to the character.

## A Street Car Named Desire

Examiners found much commendable work on this play. Many read a significant number of answers which indicated considerable engagement with the characters and the issues as well as the ability to write confidently about Williams' skill as a playwright. This was particularly in evidence in **Question 43** where many managed to probe the language Blanche uses to describe Stanley, the tension created by the audience's awareness that it is all being overheard and the significance of music and train. Weaker answers, however, often almost ignored Blanche's speech, did not seem to realise that Stanley was listening and tended to drift away to generalities about the dramatic action as a whole outside the extract. In **Question 44** there was a great deal of insight shown into the relationship Stella had with Stanley. Some managed to probe its complex contradictions very well indeed, with detailed support from moments in the play. Conversely, in some instances the task became converted into more a character sketch of Stanley and in others a few candidates failed to confront in any way the central role that sex played in the relationship. Again, as through the paper as a whole, Examiners were pleased with the quality of the answers to the empathic task. One or two expressed surprise that this was so in regard to the character of Mitch who is perhaps not one of the most instantly memorable characters in the play. However, perhaps it is a tribute to the playwright that so many were able to make something of Mitch's innocence and essential decency.