

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 9765/01  
Poetry and Prose

## Key messages

- The most successful answers are focused clearly on the questions, using relevant material and, in **Section A**, poems which are appropriate to the particular demands of the task.
- Critical material is best integrated when it helps to point and illustrate a developing argument and personal response.
- Biographical speculation which simply relates apparent events and personalities in the writer's life to the work itself is rarely illuminating and often reductive.
- Contextual material of an apt nature may be historical or social, but literary and cultural contexts more often facilitate a well-structured argument.

## General comments

There were no rubric infringements and no short work in this session. Essays revealed extensive knowledge of the texts and, in some cases, of the writer's life, though the former was naturally more productive of good critical essays. Few answers failed to reach the minimum standard required for a Pass and many revealed the exceptional insight and control necessary for the very best Distinction work. Most of the set texts had been studied, though there were no essays on Milton, Jennings or Mansfield. Keats and Larkin were both extremely popular.

The Level Descriptors highlight the importance of relevance in essays. The careful selection of material suitable to answer a specific question on a text is an essential skill. In the case of a poet's work, all the poems in the selection should be well known so that the best choices can be made for a particular task. In the detailed notes on questions which follow, examples are given of poems discussed which were tangential to the question asked, or insufficiently justified as relevant within the essay. Enthusiasm for particular poems or attachment to particular episodes in a novel or to major themes may be laudable, but sometimes these need to be deselected for sharper focus on the actual question asked. It is not necessary for candidates to write everything they know about a text. Careful choice creates concision and appropriate emphasis, essential for higher grades.

When a question asks 'How far do you agree?', it is an invitation to consider the validity of the proposition, not necessarily to endorse it. Those answers which challenged Donne's poetry as 'poetry of persuasion' often wrote original answers, for example, and candidates who distinguished between 'wounds' and 'humiliations' in Plath's poetry showed careful discrimination towards the terms of the question, enabling a nuanced response.

Although critical material was discernibly better controlled this year, there was a tendency in some answers to run through different critical approaches trying to induce something about the text in hand, for example: 'From a Marxist point of view....from a Feminist point of view....from a Freudian point of view...' This can lead to mechanical and sometimes tangential responses. 'Personal response' is consistently emphasised in the mark scheme and it should be 'informed' by the views of others.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Section A – Poetry**

#### **Question 1 *The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale***

- (a) Responses were well informed and thoughtful. Both options were equally subscribed and candidates discussed 'sin' with careful consideration of the Pardoner's nature and the *Tale* that he

tells. Solid grounding in the Medieval context was evident and close attention to the text was a strong feature in many answers. The best responses defined what is meant by 'sin', considering its manifestations and its effects in both *Prologue* and *Tale*.

- (b) Many answers considered the Pardoner's qualities as a showman who uses the skills and techniques of the actor to enliven his 'performance'. There were a good number of lively answers here, with particularly apt quotations to illustrate his use of expressive emphasis, repetition and gesture. However, many essays also touched on other aspects of his presentation, broadening the discussion to consider the confessional nature of his utterances and what effect this has on the work as a whole

### Question 2 *John Donne: Selected Poems*

- (a) Both Donne questions were again equally subscribed and a secure appreciation of the complexities of theme and tone characterised answers. Most answers agreed that Donne's is 'poetry of persuasion', though some fine answers considered carefully but finally disagreed with the proposition, arguing for other qualities as more important. *The Flea* appeared in almost every answer to both (a) and (b), with perhaps a choice from four or five other poems; candidates are advised to study closely more of the set poems so that they are able to make appropriate choices for whatever questions are asked; a wider range of reference tended to accompany the more accomplished answers. Consideration of different interpretations was strength here.
- (b) Detailed exemplification was the main characteristic of answers here, with the image of the compasses appearing, perhaps not surprisingly, in every answer. Many sophisticated responses ranged across a large number of poems, considering the place of the conceit in each, but drawing individual instances into an argument about Donne's *concerns*. Some excellent work was seen.

Question 3 (a) and (b) There were no responses on Milton.

### Question 4 *John Keats: Selected Poems*

- (a) Keats was enormously popular. Most answers showed engagement and appreciation of the poetry and the more philosophical concerns which underpin it. There are still some rather surprising definitions of 'negative capability' at work in essays and a thorough reading of the source is recommended. The best responses made an appropriate choice of poems. Keats wrote some fine narrative poems represented in the selection which tell clear stories, often beautifully constructed. Other poems may be used if carefully justified as stories: the Grecian Urn, for example, is a sylvan historian and its stories are incomplete – a point made eloquently in some answers. Some candidates chose favourite or known poems whether they told a story or not: few of the sonnets are substantial enough to convince as stories. Those who used the narrative poems cited framing devices, characterisation, use of myth and legend, description, dialogue and so on to make a credible response.
- (b) Successful answers focused on the Odes and worked thoughtfully on the issues of seasonal change and the passage of time which are such important themes. These are complex poems and an appreciation of their fine detail is helpful: in *To Autumn*, for example, each stanza develops through the season from early to late Autumn. Several answers claimed the poem is about women's laziness – a view which was not convincingly demonstrated or relevant to the question. *Ode to a Nightingale* was discussed in almost every essay, though again, close knowledge of the text informed the more cogent answers. The first stanza uses the words *as though of hemlock I had drunk*, not 'because of hemlock I have drunk.' Such details are vital for valid interpretation.

### Question 5 *T. S. Eliot: Selected Poems*

Work on Eliot has been of consistently high quality since the inception of the syllabus. The selection is demanding but candidates have evidently found it extremely rewarding, with answers correspondingly engaged and cogent.

- (a) Although the (b) option was more widely taken, there were some excellent answers using settings of rooms and houses in close detail to explore theme and mood. *Preludes*, *Portrait of a Lady* and *Prufrock*, together with sections of *The Waste Land* and *Gerontion* were all used with thoughtful clarity.

- (b) Many answers considered *melancholy* as the dominant mood in the *Selected Poems* and ranged widely to explore the validity of this critical assertion. Those answers which attempted a definition of the word created focus at the outset. Most agreed with the proposition but there were others that argued forcefully for *despair*, whilst a few used poems not often employed in essays to highlight a playful and humorous side to the poet's work to remind the reader of other moods. On the whole this group of essays represented a considerable achievement, combining exceptional textual knowledge with mature judgement and cogent argument.

**Question 6 (a) and (b):** There were no responses on Jennings.

**Question 7 Sylvia Plath: Ariel**

In this, the last year for the *Ariel* collection, essays were the best yet seen, with close textual detail supporting thoughtful judgements of the poetry and a minimum of intrusive biographical material.

- (a) Most answers agreed that the poetry is *poetry of wounds and humiliations*, though some thoughtful responses made a distinction between the two, arguing that wounds are often enjoyed by the poet whilst humiliations are not. Others argued that though these qualities were present, other more positive or even aggressive moods could dominate. There was a full range of answers to this question, with many thoughtful and knowledgeable responses.
- (b) *Imagery from the natural world* was interpreted widely, with some using the question to discuss motherhood. The moon, trees, horses and other natural phenomena were also considered, with a reasonable spread of reference. Most candidates chose to discuss two or three poems and did not *range more widely* which is of course acceptable in terms of the question wording, but demanding in terms of detail.

**Question 8 Philip Larkin: Selected Poetry**

Once again very popular, Larkin's work did unfortunately evoke many simplistic biographical statements which detracted from analysis of the poetry. Interestingly, *Church Going* was the most widely discussed of all the poems used in both (a) and (b), not perhaps the first poem that springs to mind for discussing either *journeys* or *ordinary speech*.

- (a) Although the (b) option was more popular, the *ideas and images of journeys* were well handled, with obvious physical journeys such as that in *The Whitsun Weddings* and *Dockery and Son* frequently discussed, together with the ambulance in *Ambulances* – all streets in time are visited. Many answers discussed different interpretations of the end of *The Whitsun Weddings* effectively. However, more metaphorical, philosophical or even spiritual journeys were also proposed and these could be very convincing if carefully justified. *An Arundel Tomb* is a case in point. A poem often quoted but not argued as compellingly in this context was *MCMXIV*, where an atmosphere of stasis and calm pervades, rather than the movement of a journey. These answers often imposed the hindsight of the history of the First World War onto the poem, rather than attending to its specific language and tone.
- (b) Many essays were written in response to this question, though not all were quite focused on its demands. All considered the *big questions* but not many engaged with the *language of ordinary speech*. Some had evidently prepared an essay on 'ordinary objects' but the examples used were often tangential. Larkin's use of expletives or coarse language was often quoted and discussed, but some thoughtful answers cited language (often within those same poems such as *High Windows*), which was more mysterious and abstract. The casual utterances in parts of *Church Going* are counter-balanced by diction such as *pyx* and *parchment* – hardly ordinary language. The old fools may piss themselves, but the description of their memories of youth is expressively lyrical; there is nothing ordinary about *the million-petalled flower of being here*, either. Not surprisingly, *Aubade* with its wardrobe taking shape in the morning light was often quoted as ordinary language, though the final simile is only apparently a commonplace one. A few individualists made fine, detailed cases for Larkin's language being anything but ordinary.

## Section B – Prose

### Question 9 *Jonathan Swift: Gulliver's Travels*

Relatively few answers were seen on Swift but they were of a very high standard, consistently analytical and well structured with a range of material drawn from all the voyages. Choice was evenly divided between (a) and (b).

- (a) Answers ranged widely, using detailed evidence to support a mostly affirmative approach to the prompt quotation. Some argued that the modifier *fiercely* was not true in all cases. Swift's satire was appreciated and well discussed.
- (b) Responses often defined what travel writing methods they were considering and this was an effective way to begin the essay, using such ideas as conceptions of geographical and social worlds, ideas of otherness, perceptions of danger and so on. As in (a), range across the different voyages was broad but much detailed evidence was employed.

### Question 10 *Jane Austen: Persuasion*

Austen's work remains very popular, with sound, well-detailed essays across the board.

- (a) More candidates attempted this option and there were many excellent answers. *Hope* is not the same as *renewal* and many essays made careful distinction between them. There were many very good or sophisticated answers exploring the issues and quoting in careful detail to support a cogent argument.
- (b) Although not as popular as (a) there were many fresh and original approaches to the question which once again showed great familiarity with the text. Many noted the irony of the beginning of the novel and Sir Walter's self-indulgent reading material as well as the importance of the Benwick episodes. Others moved beyond reading to leisure pursuits such as music or walking, with the opportunities given to reveal character and allow significant conversation. If considered carefully, the novel offers much to discuss in terms of activities other than work and essays usefully contrasted leisure activities with the work of the navy.

### Question 11 *Elizabeth Gaskell: North and South*

The novel was new to the syllabus this year and is already proving popular. Contextual material on Victorian industrialisation was well used, by and large, though it should not overwhelm literary analysis. In writing on a long and complex novel such as this, the temptation to tell part of the story must be avoided.

- (a) This was a popular topic and the strong personalities of Margaret and Thornton dominated the discussion. However, the novel has other strong personalities, such as Thornton's mother or Higgins and the choice of material could dictate the development of the argument. Detailed evidence from the text often proved a discriminator for higher grades.
- (b) The town of Milton was well discussed in terms of its presentation and significance. Occasionally essays strayed into North versus South territory: a close focus on the question must always inform the conduct of the argument. On the whole, detailed evidence of the *presentation* of Milton was weaker than the more general topic of its *significance*.

### Question 12 *Charles Dickens: Bleak House*

Exceptional textual knowledge was evident in answers and essays used a wide range of characterisations, settings and descriptions to support their work on both (a) and (b).

- (a) The novel begins with London and essays quoted from the first pages with accuracy, moving on to discuss the characteristic London locations used by Dickens in this novel. A strong emphasis on the law and Chancery, as well as on disease, both physical and metaphorical, characterised many answers, but this is a rich field from which to select and the standard of exemplification in answers was generally very high. The novel is, in spite of its length, very well known and appreciated.

- (b) All answers agreed that the novel is an assault on the class system, but fewer tackled the question of humour in an integrated fashion. Those which did often had the resources of close quotation from the novel to support them: the tone with which Dickens deals with such matters as the death of Jo the crossing sweeper, for example, contrasted with his portraits of Sir Leicester or Tulkinghorn is worthy of close critical appreciation. Detailed analysis of form, structure and language was essential here for a comprehensive approach, whatever material from the novel was used.

**Question 13 *Edith Wharton: The Age of Innocence***

- (a) There were some exceptional answers to this question: thoughtful, subtle and mature. The prompt quotation was carefully considered, but not endorsed, for the most part. Many argued that the conflict between individuals was a central manifestation of the conflict between the individual and society and both aspects were considered with care.
- (b) There were fewer answers here, but they too considered the complexities of the novel's presentation of American identity with care and thoughtful detail. Archer is always a focus for such discussion, but there was also very useful comparison with Ellen and, more broadly, the contrast of old Europe and America. As in answers to (a), contextual awareness underpinned answers without overwhelming them.

**Question 14 *Evelyn Waugh: A Handful of Dust***

Waugh's novel was extremely popular, the pairing of Keats with *A Handful of Dust* being the most common option across the paper. Candidates appreciate the novel's concerns and tone, though narrative treatment or concentration on very few incidents or events (such as John Andrew's death) could unbalance essays. Close textual knowledge seemed confined to the earlier parts of the novel in some cases.

- (a) This was the more popular option, with the genres of *tragedy* and *comedy* both considered, though whether the former is seen through the lens of the latter was largely unaddressed. There was much focus on the tragedy of John Andrew's death, though those who looked closely at its presentation often found interesting things to say about Waugh's handling of it. The other major 'tragedy' was considered to be Tony's jungle fate reading Dickens for ever to Mr Tod. Waugh's tone is not simply summed up and those who attempted detailed analysis of his satirical word choices came closest. There was some quite exceptionally insightful work at the top of the range which considered methods and effects with subtle precision.
- (b) Although less popular, there were still a large number of essays on this topic. Much attention was focused on the Beavers and the contrast between material and moral values was a common theme. Telling detail was employed in many answers, revealing a really close engagement with the novel.

**Question 15 (a) and (b):** There were no answers on Mansfield.

**Question 16 *Kazuo Ishiguro: The Remains of the Day***

New to the syllabus this year, the novel was very popular. Candidates are fascinated by Stevens and write about him with some perception. The journey aspect of the novel's structure was also appreciated.

- (a) Some answers concentrated on Stevens and whether or not great changes occur in his life and attitudes, not always coming to the same conclusions. These could be sensitive and thoughtful essays. However, the novel has as its context great social and historical change as well; essays which considered this context ranged more widely and often had useful comments to make about narrative method too, since an unreliable narrator is being employed to imply much more significant public matters than he is aware of.
- (b) Less widely chosen than (a) candidates nonetheless wrote well on Lord Darlington, coming to the conclusion that he may not have been a bad man, but that he was a weak one. Some wrote more uncompromisingly about his moral failure within the social context of the time. The essay title also asks for a consideration of Stevens, whose comment this is, and much depended for the argument on what had been said about his employer. The relationship between them was often analysed with care, with some arguing that his treatment of Stevens was one of the contributory factors in his being 'bad', in the sense of lacking in empathy or understanding.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 9765/02

Drama

## Key messages

- When answering passage-based questions, candidates must be prepared to deal fully with the language and action of the extract
- Contexts, while relevant, should emerge from the sweep of an essay's literary arguments and requirements, rather than being the driving force for the answer.

## General comments

At the highest level, candidates for this paper produce work of quite extraordinary insight. Arguments are often tersely expressed and highly individual, showing insight into the text that goes way beyond what might have been gathered in a classroom. Across the whole range, more and more candidates are showing clear evidence of using productions of plays as one of the possibilities for demonstrating understanding that different interpretations of a text are possible. Slightly lower down the range there is often insight that is not quite so fully supported from the text but nonetheless shows full engagement with form, structure and language.

One noticeable aspect of work in the 'middle parts of fortune' is that it tends to be rather longer than work elsewhere. This suggests a slight unwillingness to make strategic choices about what is truly relevant.

Even with less sophisticated work, there was always clear knowledge of the texts and a willingness to engage with their literary qualities. As might be expected, arguments here were often less original or insightful and support was rather thinner. At times, material of tangential significance (often related to context) featured, and this blurred the responses slightly by taking focus away from the precise demands of the question.

At all but the very highest levels, there were candidates who perhaps did not read the questions closely enough and therefore did not engage quite with their full complexity and implications.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Question 1 William Shakespeare: *Measure for Measure***

- (a) Approaches to this question were many and varied. Many focused on contrasting the different world views of Isabella and Angelo. Others looked at the Duke's ambiguity towards the issue or at Claudio's predicament as someone who is simply swept up into the moral panic presented in the play. There were some very interesting answers that took the presentation of the Viennese underworld as a starting point. Less secure responses tended to ignore the phrase 'attitudes towards' thus creating a different and rather less challenging question. The very best answers paid close attention to the rich diversity of language used to characterise sexual desire.
- (b) Candidates often responded soundly by discussing their ambiguous response to the Duke. Many felt quite strong distaste for him because he plays around knowingly and rather cruelly with other people's destinies. Very good answers tussled with the language of his speech here, and with the issue of whether he is speaking sincerely or simply evoking the sentiments of his monkish persona. There was often clear reflection on the imagery and structure of what he says, and this was sometimes linked to his other lengthy speeches in the play. Some answers provided sound character study but often failed to look closely enough at the passage presented. Few candidates dealt with the last line of the extract ('Bring me to hear them speak, where I may be concealed'), an obvious way into a discussion of the Duke's predilection for spying and duplicity.

**Question 2 William Shakespeare: *King Lear***

- (a) Across the range, candidates were confident about their responses to the central figure of the play. Some, naturally, saw him as more sinned against than sinning; others argued that his sins, particularly in relation to his treatment of Cordelia, spoke strongly about his wilfulness and, at times, his deeply unappealing behaviour. Good answers were clear about dramatic effects at specific moments, without tending towards narration. Discussion of the contrasting characters such as Kent or Gloucester often produced surprising and interesting illumination. Despite the term ‘tragic’ in the question, surprisingly few responses offered an explicit definition, though most were aware that tragedy takes place predominantly in the mind of the protagonist. Many candidates made use of productions they had seen in order to highlight their own views, and this provided a useful way into discussion of different critical views and interpretations.
- (b) Success in this question quite often depended upon the candidate’s willingness to deal closely with detail from the passage. Most were able to see Kent’s anger, and his insistence on honesty, whatever the consequences. The focus was usually (and rightly) on what Kent says but candidates needed to recognise that the force of the scene comes from the interaction and from our reaction to this faithful follower being dismissed as ‘some fellow’ by Cornwall, and from the tiny but spiteful interjection by Regan at the end. More could perhaps have been made, too, of Oswald’s carefully biased presentation of past behaviour by Kent that is unbelievable. Some candidates ranged too widely too soon: a question like this looks for close focus before range, and a whole play character study is not fully to the point.

**Question 3 William Shakespeare: *Henry IV, Part 1***

- (a) The majority of candidates focused on the rebel cause as presented in the play. More subtle responses were able to see that the issue goes deeper than that, with Hal playing out an internal conflict about his various loyalties to the King and to Falstaff. There were also some (often very good answers) that focused on Henry IV as a usurper and the various sorts of loyalty or disloyalty that he might be expected to engender in his subjects. His cold and calculating discussion with Hal about how he presents himself to the world often evoked a negative response in candidates, who felt little sympathy for him and measured their own reaction as a means of knowing that he has loyalty because of his role, not because of his personality. Discussions of the insecurities expressed in the opening soliloquy often deepened and substantiated the case.
- (b) The contrast between Hal’s playboy persona and his inner musings was clearly presented by all candidates. Key discriminators for higher level performance centred on analysis of the language of the passage. There was often very interesting discussion of the differences between prose and blank verse, and also of Hal’s private fondness for metaphor. The first line of the extract (‘...once in my days I’ll be a madcap’) often provided the way in for what followed. A number of candidates plainly found Hal rather unlikeable at this point in the play; others felt that his manipulation of Poins and Falstaff was good training for kingship. Others, rather winningly, saw him as the posh kid trying to fit in but unable to override his upbringing, as seen in his rather hesitant ‘tis like that they will know us by our horses.’ Candidates who were able to focus on the language and this ambiguity did well. Answers that tended towards general character study, or towards discussion of Hal’s relationship with his father and with Falstaff, were less successful.

**Question 4 John Webster: *The White Devil***

- (a) The corruption that infects every level of the action was well caught by candidates. There were explorations of ideas about exploitation of power and self-interest at every level, and candidates often evoked backgrounds of Machiavellian thought or Jacobean distrust of Catholicism as a means of focusing their arguments. The self-serving nature of everyone in the play was often carefully captured by reference to particular moments, and candidates were very clear that the political élite sees itself as outside the grasp of the law or morality. A small number of candidates misinterpreted the question to mean legal courts, thus creating a two-pronged question that offered particular challenges. Even here, discussion of the arraignment scene often provided relevant examples and support for a case. Some very good answers focused on the outsiders such as Flamineo and his mother as a means of discussing how Webster frames an audience’s response.
- (b) The violence of the extract and its significance as the moment where justice might be seen to be done acted as a suitable starting point for many candidates, and there was frequently very close

analysis of ways in which the visual qualities of the scene are typical of the play as a whole. Lodovico's use of the conventions and language of the church at the beginning was often adduced as a neat irony. Farcical elements were sometimes discussed as typical of the play's action elsewhere. There was much discussion of how the exaggerated cruelty seen here, and revelled in by the revengers, is typical of much of the earlier action, where both word and deed are often excessive and cynical.

**Question 5 Richard Brinsley Sheridan: *The Rivals***

- (a) Responses to this question saw clearly that the contrast is one of the structuring devices of the play, one of the methods Sheridan uses to poke fun at the excesses of romantic love as defined through the excesses of cheap novels of the time. Reference to Lydia's reading and to the way that she manipulates others so that she can play the romantic heroine provided useful material. Candidates pointed out that the contrast gives the play more variation, more of a sense that it is not merely a satirical confection.
- (b) There was much fun to be had with this passage, and most candidates dealt delicately with the ludicrousness of the situation and with the sheer absurdity of these characters as having anything to do with teaching morality and good behaviour to those in their charge. Mrs Malaprop's limitations were clearly outlined, and there was often careful reference to the fact that she behaves like a love-struck teenager elsewhere in the play. Focus on the matter of the passage – the discussion of education for girls – often provided opportunities for widening of the discussion to the behaviour of the young people elsewhere and their contempt for their elders. Discussions (sometimes lengthy) about Mrs Malaprop's indebtedness to Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* rarely added much insight; contexts have to be carefully weighed for their relevance before being included.

**Question 6 Harold Pinter: *The Homecoming***

- (a) Candidates were confident about the implications of the question and showed insight into the various ways – both verbal and physical – in which the characters express their dislike and disdain for others. There was much excellent work on how shared family traits allow the different characters instant access to the weak points of others. Other answers went in by dealing with the characters' sexual insecurities or their attitudes towards women. The best answers dealt fully with dramatic presentation and focused on particular scenes where the psychological war is at its most powerful.
- (b) A number of answers made much of the symbolic significance of the cigars: this was approached with varying degrees of competence and subtlety. The tension between Teddy and Lenny was usually clearly understood and analysed. Lenny's familiarity with the language of philosophy and his ability to challenge and threaten Teddy on his own territory proved a fertile area for discussion. Candidates were often able to broaden their discussions by talking about typical Pinter-esque features of this scene such as threatening silences or the stories that the characters tell. Nearly all candidates provided acute focus on Ruth and the various ways in which she changes the family dynamic, both here and elsewhere. There was often clear discussion of the sexual undertones, but only the best candidates made something of Ruth's 'perhaps you misinterpret' as a way into the play's broader significances. A small number of candidates made something of Ruth's revelation that she was born 'near here', and of her dislike of America, a sudden surprise for an audience, perhaps, and a broadening of the idea of the homecoming.

**Question 7 Brian Friel: *Dancing at Lughnasa***

- (a) The central issue raised here was one of how Friel makes the Ireland of the 1930s come alive in his play. At the lower end of the mark range, a small number of candidates saw the question as an invitation to unload some of the contextual material that they had researched. More secure responses looked at the situation of the family and saw it as a metaphor for a society in the process of change, both from new technologies and from an erosion of old certainties about religion and morality. The best answers offered precise and detailed analysis of particular moments where the tensions are rawest in the play. Many pointed out astutely that as it is a memory play, part of the dramatic presentation comes through Michael's evocation of the time in hindsight. The dramatic presentation of Ireland was rather better done than that of Irishness – a nudge that could perhaps have led candidates towards the love of story telling and the rose tinted nostalgia which dominates so much of the play.

- (b) Candidates adopted a range of approaches to this question. The best responses noted the contrasts between the language of young Michael and his older adult self. Much was often made of what the young Michael represents to the sisters: the playful relationship with Maggie was obvious from the bulk of the passage, but many observed that the fact that Kate's face lights up with pleasure gives us an insight into the family dynamic that may not be obvious through what she says elsewhere. Some answers made much of the kites as symbols of freedom and as a metaphor for Michael's subsequent view of the restrictions of his life. Most answers dealt effectively with the stage conventions that Friel establishes in this scene, and saw their implications both here and elsewhere in the play.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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<p><b>Paper 9765/03</b> <b>Comment and Analysis</b></p>
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## Key messages

Successful answers:

- had absorbed enough of the texts to make an opening statement that provided the basis of the answer
- had a clear idea of the qualities of the genre
- always analysed in detail
- knew when a contextual reference had been sufficiently established to make the point
- did not merely list technical terms for literary devices but analysed their effects
- showed evidence of good time management.

## Comments on specific questions

### Question 1

Cogent answers almost always began with an outline comparison of the passages. Even when this was tentative it gave a structure to the answer. Some candidates succeeded with an approach that examined **A** before going on to examine **B** with reference back to **A**, but generally this was a less successful method.

Better candidates focused on humour and irony, having grasped the extracts in their entirety, including the significance of the final paragraph in **B**; they realised that in neither passage was any work really being done. Beyond this, many answers analysed different readings and emphases; there was much good comparative work, particularly on the details of narrative technique and tone. Those who wrote on irony and satire, and the ways in which they are developed in both passages found much to say, often led to this consideration by their analysis of the narrator's character in **A**.

Some candidates concentrated more on **B** than **A**, and some of these tended to write more descriptively than analytically. The effects in **B** of attitudes to work were clear to all, but the approach in **A** led to a variety of readings, many of them well supported from the text. There were some, for instance, who saw in **A** the building of castles in the air, or the extravagances of a narrator who had little to do and wanted less. Others saw a self-deceiving character whose statements led to a sort of conspiracy between author and reader in which the narrator revealed his weaknesses in apparent innocence.

Many seemed to find **B** clearer. They analysed the use of 'hustle', and found a hard amusement in the revelation of the final paragraph, which led some to re-examine the character of the narrator.

There were some who referred to **A** as a poem (in spite of the guidance in the question), mainly because of the couplet they thought they saw in lines 17 and 18. These candidates usually went on to redeem their work by further analytical developments in their essays, and showed some grasp of prose techniques.

### Question 2

There was much good work on this question, involving a variety of readings that responded to the joy that echoes throughout the poem. Most candidates saw it as referring to the birth of a child, and some saw it as an expression of the writer's joy at his own creation. Others saw it as the arrival in heaven, and a few saw it as celebrating the arrival of the Renaissance. Some of these readings were more sustainable than others, and some candidates changed their reading as the poem became more familiar to them. There was much good work on the effects of form and rhythm, and a realisation of the ecstatic happiness in the poem. Those candidates who took the title as their starting point were able to shape their responses well. Most candidates

commented effectively on the references to riches in the fourth stanza and the repetition of 'strange' in the last stanza, particularly when it becomes 'strangest' in the last line.

The inclusion of contextual comment was variable. The simplest was the reference to faith and joy, seen by some as typical of its time, and there was helpful comment on the references to 'dust' and chaos' in the second stanza. Such comment arose naturally and economically from the analysis of the poem. There was also some more heavy-handed contextual comment, based on Traherne's dates rather than on the content of the poem. Certainly many candidates were enthused with their knowledge of the history of ideas, and of the Enlightenment in particular, sometimes to the extent of introducing a subsidiary essay on the topic.

In all this variety of response most candidates wrote movingly about the ways in which love and ecstasy are expressed in this poem.

### Question 3

Many candidates wrote with relish on this question. They were successful in visualising the set and analysing its details in the light of the dialogue. Some of them were disconcerted to see Leslie described as 'violent'. Others realised that this was a feature of her character that could be developed later in the play: they saw a suggestion of it in actions such as Leslie's taking the chair habitually used by her unknown boss. They then saw the hasty abandonment of the chair as possible evidence of her shyness or her cleverness. A few candidates had difficulty in matching stage directions and dialogue; others saw how a director could exploit both to achieve complex effects.

There was some good writing about the 'maze' of file drawers, closed and then (perhaps tactfully) re-opened by Leslie as she explores the office. Other aspects of the setting were also enthusiastically analysed – the mess and disorganisation, for instance, and the ways in which they might be said to contradict the title of the play. The details of the setting were a fruitful source of relevant contextual comment, as were the characters of Arnold and Geoffrey in their interactions with Leslie. There was also some contextual comment on the differences between a rather ancient newspaper office compared with the modern digital newspaper office.

Some candidates seemed surprised at the extent of the stage directions, and seemed more at home with commenting on the dialogue, with its gradual revelation of character. In some scripts this led to an unbalanced commentary that might have been more suited to a short story than an extract from a play. Some suggested that Arnold and Geoffrey were aspects of the same character, while others concentrated on Leslie's reactions to them. Many wrote about the post-modern features of the extract.

There was careful work on Geoffrey's conversation, particularly his use of 'lovely' and his attempt to welcome Leslie and put her at ease. There were also many helpful references to the contrast between order and disorder, youth and age, and presence and absence.

# LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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**Paper 9765/04**  
**Personal Investigation**

## **Key Messages**

The best answers:

- were individual and personal in respect of both texts and topic; Paper 4 is entitled “Personal Investigation”, and the adjective is important;
- had followed the advice offered by CIE in response to the candidates’ Outline Proposal Forms;
- considered in some detail the ways in which form, structure and language shape meaning, whichever the genre of each text;
- ensured that there was sufficient reference to, and quotation from, the two or more subsidiary texts as well as the two main ones;
- made thoughtful use of appropriate academic and/or critical research, and considered the effects of contexts upon how the texts are written and read.

## **General Comments**

The best essays were very good indeed, and were frequently quite exceptionally interesting and often highly scholarly; there were a few where candidates for a variety of reasons had not achieved the minimum standards required for a Pass Level, sometimes because they had omitted in one way or another to meet the Syllabus requirements rather than because of an inability to write with sufficient critical acumen. The majority of essays, however, were securely competent or proficient. It was noted that there was some decrease in the range of texts used by some Centres and some candidates; more will be said of this later.

## **Key Assessment Objectives**

The first requirement of the first assessment objective is that: candidates must, in the words of the Level 3 descriptor, “*advance an appropriate response to texts and topic*”; at Level 5 this has become “*a thoughtful, personal response to texts and topic*”, but the general thrust is exactly the same – essays must respond appropriately and if possible personally to all the selected texts in relation to the candidates’ chosen question; two points arise here, both central and crucial.

Firstly, the number of texts. The Syllabus requires that there must be two main texts, and two subsidiary, and these are to be clearly differentiated, initially on the Outline Proposal Form (OPF) submitted by candidates in the autumn term of Year 13, and subsequently at the head of the essay itself, and thus of course in the essay itself. This was not always the case this summer: some candidates wrote about all four texts in more or less equal proportions, thus making it quite hard to use the kind of closely detailed textual comparisons of two main texts that are required; some wrote almost exclusively on just two main texts, with no more than a few passing lines, often towards the end of their essays, on a third and fourth; even more seriously, a few – but a reasonably substantial few – did not mention a fourth or very occasionally even a third text at all, thus not only omitting to address the Syllabus requirement, but also making their essay significantly narrower in focus than it should have been. In order to fulfil their potential, candidates need to ensure that the greater part of their essays compares two main texts, and that there is significant reference to two subsidiary texts.

The Descriptors say that there must be “*an appropriate/thoughtful/personal*” response, but there were some essays which did not keep tightly enough to what their question actually asked, and these did less well.

Paper 4 is called “Personal Investigation”, and where the personal element was missing, essays scored less highly. Essays did well where candidates had put personal thought into the choice of title and investigated it with personal research and insight.

The second assessment objective looks for some close critical discussion, and for evidence that candidates can explore at least some of the effects of the form, the structure and above all the language used by their authors. The best essays were those in which these three factors were considered and critically discussed. More must be expected than simply general assertions, especially about form and structure, and those candidates who explored short extracts, or perhaps complete poems, while at the same time suggesting ways in which these were in some way characteristic of the rest of the text(s) in question, received higher marks; such exploration was generally restricted to the two main texts, and this was absolutely in line with what is expected. One aspect of the third assessment objective is the ability to “*relate part of the text to the whole*”, and this was often one secure and critically astute way of addressing this idea.

In particular, in relation to drama, candidates who were able to consider aspects of dialogue, stage action, interplay between characters, and – if relevant to the play – the authors’ uses of lighting or sound effects again deservedly attracted reward because they saw and discussed some particular aspects of the structuring of the text.

The first and central requirement is comparison; in the words of the Syllabus itself, “*The essay must involve significant comparisons between two authors*”. Most candidates were clearly aware of this, and most essays did contain at least some element of comparison, though some did not focus on comparison and therefore did less well. The best essays presented sustained comparison throughout, certainly of the two main texts, with the subsidiaries being interspersed as and when appropriate; and the most critically effective comparisons looked well beyond the simple contents of the texts, to consider their differing, and similar, methods and techniques too.

Contextual factors were mostly well addressed, though some essays showed little or no evidence that any had been considered; such factors may be historical or cultural, or they may be purely literary, with appropriate reference to other writing of a similar period, or a similar type. The important thing is always to ensure that contextual material is *used* to illustrate or develop an idea, not just for its own sake.

Mention has been made above of length: essays should be between 3000 and 3500 words. The minimum length is to enable candidates to write in sufficient detail, bearing in mind that four texts are concerned, and the maximum length is to help candidates keep their writing concise and focused. Essays this summer were almost uniformly within these two limits, but those who strayed outside them – usually going beyond 3500 – were generally self-penalising, in that there was a tendency towards repetition, generalisation, over-reliance on narrative or description, lack of tight focus.

### **Outline Proposals**

Proposals are important in helping candidates produce their best work.

Most proposals correctly listed at least four texts, clearly defining the two main and the two or more subsidiaries; a very small number had to be returned for this to be clarified. Most, too, proposed appropriate texts, though again a small number had to be revised because one or more texts were inappropriate – they were set for Papers 1 or 2, for example, or they were texts in translation, or they were simply too slight for the kind of close academic study and research that the Syllabus requires. Texts that had been used, or indeed that could have been used, for GCSE work are unlikely to elicit the kind of analysis that will attract high marks at this level. though brief reference to them as a fifth text may sometimes be acceptable. What must always be expected is that the four texts are of similar length, of similar literary demand, and of similar academic standing, to those set for Papers 1 and 2; they need not of course be “canonical” texts, and indeed some of the most striking and individual essays came from unusual texts, whether contemporary or older. Proposed texts that were critical or cultural in nature had to be “not approved”; all four must be creative and literary, though other texts may of course be used for the purposes of appropriate academic research.

There were some Centres whose text choices were clearly and unarguably entirely individual, and whose essays were similarly personal; there were also some whose candidates all proposed almost exactly the same, or as suggested earlier four out of a common group of six or seven, and whose essays inevitably therefore contained much in common, and inevitably too less that was independent and individual. A compromise between these extremes was the most usual, and almost certainly the easiest for a Centre to manage: one or possibly two common texts, with at least two or usually three more that appeared to be the candidates’ own choices.

By far the most common genre was prose, and in this genre almost all were novels; poetry was relatively rare, and drama even more so; there is much to gain from having work from at least two genres, if only to enable and encourage a wider range of critical and contextual material, quite apart from lessening the

occasionally almost unmanageable weight of four long novels. When poetry *is* used, however, candidates must write about a published collection or selection, rather than a “home-made” one, and they must – as with Paper 1 – show that they have studied a good number of poems, not just two or three. The same must be the case if a collection of short stories is used.

As comparison of authors is at the heart of what the Syllabus requires, it was helpful to candidates when titles foregrounded this aspect. Some proposals had to be returned for revision when there was no indication that comparison was planned, or very occasionally when candidates suggested writing something far bigger and broader than could possibly be managed within 3500 words, with two specified texts at the centre of the study.

Candidates who acted on the advice received from Cambridge did better than those who ignored it.

Once an OPF has been approved then it should not be changed except in exceptional circumstances.

### **Presentation**

Essays are required by the Specification to be between 3000 and 3500 words long. These limits are intended to help candidates ensure **(a)** that they say enough about all four texts, and at the same time **(b)** that they write with reasonable conciseness and focus.

Footnotes are for acknowledging the source of a quotation or reference made in the body of the essay, or perhaps very occasionally for making a brief additional comment; they should not be used for writing extensive additional material which should have formed part of the main argument, and if this latter is the case then Examiners will have to take them into account when considering whether an essay is seriously over-long, and indeed whether such footnotes detract from the main thrust of the argument.

All quotations from secondary sources must be properly acknowledged, but there is no need to make footnoted page references to every quotation from the main or subsidiary texts.

Bibliographies – and where appropriate webographies – must of course be full and complete, and it is helpful if they can be in two parts: one part listing the sources that have been cited and/or quoted in the essay, and the second part listing publications and websites that have been consulted but not actually mentioned. There is no regulation house-style for bibliographies, but candidates should certainly indicate the title and writer of each text, together with publisher and date of publication, and the ISBN number where appropriate; website addresses should be given in full, together with the date on which they were last accessed.

Most Centres, and most candidates, followed the Syllabus requirements exactly and professionally; most work was submitted by the deadline (this is always April 30th), and most work was very neatly and efficiently presented, with the Pre-U cover-sheet and copies of the OPF attached.