Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2017

Pearson Edexcel IAL
In English Literature (WET03)
Unit 3: Poetry and Prose

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Introduction

Centres are thanked for choosing Pearson Edexcel for their International A-Level English Literature provider.

For this unit, WET03, the open book examination is 2 hours long and there are two sections.

For Section A, Poetry, students will use the reading skills they have developed through the course. Students will answer one essay question on a post-1900 unseen poem that is printed in a separate Source Insert.

For Section B, Prose, students answer one comparative essay question from a choice of two, on the two studied prose texts from their chosen theme. Students can select from the themes: *Growing Up, Colonisation and After, Science and Society* or *Women and Society*. For each theme, there are three set texts, which students should study in detail. Student responses will be informed by an appreciation of the contexts in which texts are written and read. Students should be encouraged to view the texts in relation to each other.

In Section B, Prose, students will study two (from three) thematically linked texts and will learn about:

- the importance of the relationship between texts, making connections and comparisons between texts
- the significance of the cultural and contextual influences under which literary texts are written and received
- how to respond creatively, relevantly and in an informed way to texts using appropriate terminology and concepts as well as coherent and accurate written expression
- how to analyse texts from a critical perspective.

There are 20 marks available for Section A and 30 for Section B. The total mark of 50 represents 25% of the total IA2.

Section A, Unseen Poetry, assesses Assessment Objectives AO1 and AO2.

Section B, Prose, assesses Assessment Objectives AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO4. AO5 is *not* assessed in this paper.

Please refer to the full specification for details of the Assessment Objectives and their weightings.

General Overview of the WET03 1701 paper and performance

There were very few entries for this first WET03 examination. All candidates must answer Section A, Question 1. Candidates then respond to a question from Section B. For this series, most candidates opted to respond to Questions 2, 6 or 7. There were no responses to Questions 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9. Some responses were a little disappointing as students did not analyse the unseen poem in sufficient depth and detail. For Section B, candidates tended to write about each novel separately and there was very little evidence of comparison. More details will follow below about each question.

Section A: Post-1900 Unseen Poetry

Question 1

The unseen poem for 1701 was: *Denouement* by Sylvia Plath.
The word *Denouement* had been glossed in order to give candidates equal opportunities when analysing the poem.

The majority of candidates were able to identify the theme of loss in the poem, but often comment was brief and analysis was simple, only providing a surface reading of the poem. In some instances, responses were not confident and did not penetrate the poem enough to consider the centrality of its metaphorical meaning. In some responses there was evidence of a wide range of poetic terminology, but often the quotations used for supporting evidence were too long and not selective enough. More exploration of the writer's craft and how meanings are shaped would benefit candidates.

For this section of the paper, candidates are required to show knowledge and understanding of the function of genre features and conventions in poetry and demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of a range of ways to read texts, including reading for detail of how writers use and adapt language, form and structure in texts and by responding critically and creatively. Candidates did not identify that the poem, *Denouement,* is written as a villanelle and only very few spotted the use of euphemisms for death or an end to a relationship.

Some responses were not as fluent as expected at this level. Candidates are required to communicate fluently, accurately and effectively their knowledge, understanding and critical evaluation of texts.

In order to qualify for marks in higher levels, candidates should be able to identify and explore how attitudes and values are expressed in texts and use literary critical concepts and terminology with understanding and discrimination.

It is recommended that centres look carefully at the *Sample Assessment Materials* and the mark scheme for this paper in order to become familiar with the assessment requirements. The mark grids demonstrate how candidates can progress from one level to the next. For Level 4 and above, responses need to be discriminating, critical and evaluative. Close analysis

should be controlled and candidates should be able to identify and provide examples of the nuances and subtleties of the writer's craft.

Context is not assessed in Section A of the paper.

Section B: Prose

There were only responses to Question 2 *(Growing Up)* and Questions 6 and 7 *(Science and Society)*.

Generally, candidates demonstrated a surface understanding of their two chosen texts and responses were often too brief, not detailed enough, took a narrative approach and lacked comparison. Most candidates tended to make general points, but often there was little exploration of techniques or the writers' craft. Some candidates provided a surface reading of the texts and there was evidence in a few responses that the texts had not been studied in sufficient detail and depth. There was evidence of relying on film versions of texts, which of course can be unreliable and subject to inaccuracies; some film versions are very different from the original texts.

Question 2

The set texts for the theme of *Growing Up* are: *What Maisie Knew, Great Expectations* and *The Color Purple.*

The question: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present parents or parental figures.

Most candidates chose to write about *What Maisie Knew* and were able to identify parental figures, such as Mrs Wix, Sir Claude and Miss Overmore and their influences on and relationships with Maisie and each other. For those who wrote about *Great Expectations,* responses focussed on Joe and Mrs Joe, but many did not consider Miss Havisham and Estella, Magwitch or the 'Aged parent'. Others who wrote about *The Color Purple* focussed on Alphonso and some considered Shug as being a guiding influence 'like a parent'. Missed opportunities included comment about Corrine and Samuel's relationship with their adoptive children, Olivia and Adam.

Questions 6 and 7

The set texts for the theme of *Science and Society* are: *Never Let Me Go, The Handmaid's Tale* and *Frankenstein.*

Question 6 focussed on comparing 'the lack of choice' and Question 7 asked candidates to compare the ways writers 'create suspense'.

Never Let Me Go appeared to be the most popular choice of text paired with one of the other set texts. For Question 6, candidates considered how Kathy is destined to become a donor and how she never questions her role. For Question 7, candidates identified that suspense is created for the reader by the reasons behind Madame collecting the art work and her role at Hailsham. Often, responses focussed on one or two areas of the novel and

did not draw on enough examples throughout the whole text. For example, some only wrote about the experiences at Hailsham and did not consider the events at the Cottages or later at the recovery centres.

For Q6, in relation to *The Handmaid's Tale*, candidates commented on the significance of: names, the patriarchal society, passivity, conformity, restrictions and censorship.

The limited responses to Question 7 that referred to *Frankenstein* were problematic, as very few examples from the novel had been provided and there was evidence that comments made were solely based on a film version. This did have a detrimental effect on the final marks awarded. Points could have been made about Victor Frankenstein's isolation and search for the creature, the use of settings and the sense of vulnerability, the deaths of loved ones, Walton's discovery of Frankenstein and many others.

General points about Section B

Little comment was made about the structure of the novels or the writers' craft; often responses did not analyse and explore the novel in enough depth and detail. The most problematic area was the comparison of the texts, as very few candidates provided an integrated comparison throughout their responses. The other problem was the reference to context. In many cases, there were no contextual points and some were not supporting any points or ideas that were being made.

Comparisons should be integrated and candidates should be encouraged to compare throughout the essay, not just in the introduction and conclusion. Bullet points 5 and 6 in the mark grids directly assess the candidates' ability to compare the texts and therefore this is an essential skill that candidates must address.

Contextual points are also required in order to meet the assessment objective. Bullets 3 and 4 of the mark grids explicitly refer to context. Guidance is provided in the specification and is included here for ease of reference:

Guidance on AO3

Context is information that informs the understanding of a text. There are different kinds of context that affect a writer's work and a reader's response to it.
Students should select relevant contextual material to illustrate and develop their response to the question. This could include:

- the author's own life and individual situation, including the place and time of writing, only where these relate to the text
- the historical setting, time and location of the text
- social and cultural contexts, e.g. attitudes in society, expectations of different cultural groups

- the literary context of the text, e.g. literary movements or genres.

The specification states that for Section B, students are required to:

- show knowledge and understanding of how genre features and conventions operate in prose fiction texts
- show knowledge and understanding of a range of ways to read texts, including reading for detail of how writers use and adapt language, form and structure in texts, responding critically and creatively
- show knowledge and understanding of a range of literary texts and make connections and explore the relationships between texts
- show knowledge and understanding of the contexts in which texts have been produced and received and understanding of how these contexts influence meaning
- identify and explore how attitudes and values are expressed in texts
- communicate fluently, accurately and effectively their knowledge, understanding and evaluation of texts
- use literary critical concepts and terminology with understanding and discrimination
- make appropriate use of the conventions of writing in literary studies, referring accurately and appropriately to texts and sources.

Paper Summary

Based on performance on this paper, centres and candidates are offered the following advice:

- address the assessment objectives and use mark schemes to guide teaching
- encourage candidates to use a range of literary terminology to identify ways in which writers create meaning; discuss the effect of these techniques have on the reader or audience
- for Section B, ensure that candidates make comparisons and refer to context when writing about the chosen novels
- context is not simply writing about history but can relate to a whole series of factors – political, social, cultural, etc – that influence both the writer and the reader. Context should be integrated and linked to the ideas and points being made. Context should not be 'bolt-on'
- avoid narrative re-telling of the texts chosen for Section B. Narrative approaches are rarely successful.
- read the exact wording of the question carefully and answer this question, rather than one practised before the exam
- enjoy reading and writing and share enthusiasm with the examiner.

Thank you.

Principal Examiner
(IAL English Literature WET 03)
February 2017

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link: