Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

June 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 increased entries for this summer series and the quality of responses was often very good and in several instances the essays were critical and evaluative. The quality of responses was much better than seen in our first series January 2017.

All candidates must answer Section A, Question 1. Candidates then respond to a question from Section B. For this series, a range of texts had been studied. The most popular prose section was for the *Science and Society* option (Questions 6 and 7) and the second most popular *Women and Society* (Questions 8 and 9). Many responses gained marks in the top two levels, although at times candidates did not cover all assessment objectives. There were some candidates who did not consider context and others that did not consider the writers' craft and the language, structure and form of the texts.

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 Question 1 was *The Draft Horse* by Robert Frost. This was a particularly successful poem as it proved to be a good discriminator with a wide range of marks awarded. Some candidates provided a simple surface reading whilst others explored the deeper and metaphorical meanings of the poem. The range of interpretations offered was varied and interesting. Interpretations included: religious, political, socio-economic and considerations of the possible links to war. As one put it, the poem considered 'the complex moral and social landscape of the 20th Century'. There were some interesting reads, such as one candidate who considered the horse as a cure, the buggy as an illness and the 'man' representative of death – with the passengers of the buggy walking into death. There was another candidate who considered in detail the significance of 'draft' – the 'draft horse' and the 'long invidious draft' and how these possibly linked and made suggestion that the 'draft horse' was a 'rough copy' that had to be erased. There were some candidates who simply could not come to terms with the fate of the 'poor horse'.

For this section of the paper, candidates are required to show knowledge and understanding of the function of genre features, 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.

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 make use of the *Sample Assessment Materials* and the mark scheme for this paper in order to become more 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.

The Unseen Poetry question assesses Assessment Objectives (AO) 1 and 2:

AO1: Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression.

AO2: Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts.

Context is not assessed in Section A of the paper.

Responses gaining marks in Level 2 provide a surface reading of the poem and may identify some literary techniques. The response will be straightforward. In order to qualify for marks in a higher level, candidates must delve more deeply into the meaning of the poem and explore possible interpretations. Ideas should be supported with a range of evidence from the poem and the use of terminology should be used confidently and appropriately. Candidates should not feature spot, but use terminology in support of points made when exploring the writer's craft.

Candidates should comment on the language, structure and form and explore why particular devices have been used by the poet.

Section B: Prose

A full range of marks was awarded for all questions.

Some candidates demonstrated a surface understanding of their two chosen texts and responses were often too brief, not detailed enough, took a narrative approach or 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.

Questions 2 and 3
Growing up

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

Question 2: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present marriage.

There were very few responses to this question. Those who did answer this tended to list the various marriages in their chosen texts and did not explore wider implications and effects of these marriages on other characters in the novels.

Question 3: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts portray the effect that one key moment has on a character's life.

This was a more popular option. Most candidates wrote about *Great Expectations* and *The Color Purple.* Points included comments about Celie's submissive character and how she 'sacrificed herself in place of Nettie'. There was consideration of the discovery of Nettie's letters and Celie's relationship with Shug. Comments in relation to *Great Expectations* included points about Pip meeting the convict, his relationship with Miss Havisham and Estella, becoming a gentleman and Pip's discovery of who his real benefactor is.

Most candidates made some comparisons, but more could have been made. There were some missed opportunities to explore contextual points and, in some cases, there was not a balance of coverage of the two texts.

Questions 4 and 5
Colonisation and After
The set texts for the theme of *Colonisation and After* are: *Heart of Darkness, The Lonely Londoners* and *A Passage to India.* This section was the least popular option for centres with just a small number of responses received.

Question 4: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present the role of women.

There were no responses to this question.

Question 5: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts make use of the diversity of culture in their novels.

There were very few responses to this question. Those who did study this theme mostly wrote about *Heart of Darkness* and *A Passage to India.* The two novels are rich with a range of areas that could be discussed in relation to the diversity in culture. There was consideration of the settings and comparisons made with the settings of The Thames and the Congo in *Heart*

of Darkness and how these illustrate the diversity in culture. Various characters were considered and how their views, attitudes and beliefs contrasted. More comment on the writers' craft would have benefited some responses.

Questions 6 and 7
Science and Society
The set texts for the theme of *Science and Society* are: *Never Let Me Go, The Handmaid's Tale* and *Frankenstein.* By far, this was the most popular section and there was a varied combination of texts. Most candidates considered *The Handmaid's Tale* and compared this with one of the other set texts.

Question 6: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present extreme ideas.

The responses to extreme ideas were mostly very successful. Candidates considered the dystopian and totalitarian societies and how extreme ideas impacted on society. There were examples of accomplished work and responses that were maturely expressed, critical and evaluative throughout. There were comments made about: the 'extreme ideas of Christian fundamentalism'; the 'monotheocratic state of Gilead'; determination, sacrifice and greed; suffering and rejection of extreme ideas; threats to humanity and many other points.

There was consideration of authorial intent and contextual exploration, although in some instances there was not enough balance in coverage of the two texts. The most successful candidates maintained a sharp focus on the question and made explicit comparisons throughout the essay.

Some long quotations were used and candidates would be better using selective quotations to support specific points made. Some candidates gained marks in the top level but did not achieve of full marks because more exploration of specific language, structure and form points needed to be included in the response.

Question 7: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts portray loss.

Candidates explored the theme of loss in a discriminating and often critical and evaluative way. Points included the consideration of loss through acceptance, control and nostalgia and others points included the loss of: family, freedom, hope, identity, rights and others. There were comments about the nature of speculative fiction and the writers' craft, particularly the use of symbolism, flashbacks and narrative structure.

A number of candidates made reference to the most recent televised adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* directed by Bruce Miller (Hulu production).

Questions 8 and 9
Women and Society
The set texts for the theme of *Women and Society* are: *Wuthering Heights, Mrs Dalloway* and *Beloved.* This was the second most popular theme.

Question 8: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present suffering.

Most candidates opted to respond to this question. Essays were, on the whole, very detailed and accomplished with many candidates gaining marks in the top two levels. There was consideration of many ways suffering is presented in the novels, such as the physical and emotional suffering, how female characters such as Sethe, Mrs Dalloway, Lucrezia and both Catherines suffer and in what ways. Some also considered how male characters suffered, such as Peter Walsh, Septimus, Heathcliff, Paul D, and others.

Suffering was explored through exploration of: confinement, choices made, conforming to society, rejection, death, suppression, sexuality, routines, and many other possible routes.

The maturity of expression was notable in many cases, with sophisticated points made, such as: 'the intercontinental and intergenerational factor of suffering', 'Her [Sethe's] suffering derives greatly from the matrilineal bond…', 'the associative diction makes readers feel pathos…'.

In both questions, a number of candidates referred to their wider reading and commented on the views of literary critics, such as Lacan, Sanger, Kermode and Eagleton.

Question 9: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts use narrative point of view.

Responses to this question were often critical and evaluative providing a detailed evaluation of the effects of literary features and a sophisticated understanding of the writer's craft.

Candidates considered the reliability or otherwise of narratives, tone, shifting narratives, the stream of consciousness, the 'Chinese Box' or frame narrative structure, the use of repetition, internal monologues and others. Candidates considered context and made relevant points in relation to the narrative structure while supporting these with relevant evidence from their chosen texts.

General points about Section B

For most questions (except Question 9), 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 for some candidates was the comparison of the texts, but there were also several responses where integrated comparisons were made

throughout and were more successful. The other problem was the reference to context. In some cases, there were no contextual points or 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

On the whole, this has been a very successful paper and many candidates have gained marks in the top two levels. Centres should be congratulated in preparing their candidates so well.

Based on performance on this paper, centres and candidates are offered the following advice for their future success:

- 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)
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Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:
http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx