Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2019

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

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 January 2019 (1901) paper and performance

This has been a successful paper, but there was just a small entry. There were no errors and no changes made to the mark scheme and there were no enquiries from centres. All candidates must answer Section A, Question 1, Unseen Poetry. Candidates then respond to a question from Section B, Prose. For this series, a range of texts had been studied and a full range of marks was awarded.

The unseen poem for Question 1 was *The Wiper* by Louis MacNeice. This was a particularly successful poem, as it proved to be a good discriminator with a range of marks awarded with most placed in Levels 2-4. There were the simple surface readings through to the more developed responses where candidates explored the deeper and metaphorical meanings of the poem. The range of interpretations offered was varied and interesting, even though some candidates missed the main idea of the poem. Interpretations included: the effects of depression, hardships, boredom and Man vs Nature.

In the prose section, the most popular choice of set texts was, once again, the *Science and Society* option (Questions 6 and 7) and close second most popular was *Growing Up* (Questions 2 and 3). There were no responses to some questions. Many responses gained marks in the top two levels, but some candidates did not consider all assessment objectives, which kept the mark lower in the levels. There were some candidates who did not consider context and others who did not consider the writers' craft, such as the language, structure and form of the texts. The majority of candidates compared their chosen texts and maintained focus on the question.

The quality of responses has much improved since the first series and candidates are handling the Assessment Objectives more confidently.
As centres have become more experienced with the demands of the specification, the quality of candidates' responses has continued to improve.

Occasionally, lapses of expression made some ideas difficult to follow. Candidates are required to communicate fluently, accurately and effectively their knowledge, understanding and critical evaluation of texts. In some instances, there was evidence of relying on the candidates' knowledge of film versions of the texts and this resulted in some inaccuracies. Candidates are expected to study their chosen novels in depth. In just one or two responses, there was little understanding demonstrated of the second text or there was some imbalance of coverage.

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.

Section A: Post-1900 Unseen Poetry

Question 1

The unseen poem for Question 1 was *The Wiper* by Louis MacNeice. This was a successful poem, as the vast majority of candidates explored the poem in some detail and looked for metaphorical meanings, thus gaining marks in Level 3 or above. A full range of marks was awarded and there was only one nil return. There were the simple surface readings, without any exploration for deeper meanings, through to the more developed responses where candidates explored the deeper and metaphorical meanings of the poem.

Interpretations were varied and interesting, such as: the effects of mental illness and depression; the hardships faced in life; the journey of life and moving forward; Man's journey and the forces of nature; decision making and life's journey to death. One candidate considered how the word 'Reaps' (line 2) could possibly link to the Grim Reaper's scythe and how this suggests a journey towards death. One candidate explored how the title sounded like 'The Viper' and linked this to the dark imagery used in the

poem. Another made a very good point about the uncertainty of the journey and how this compared with the 'rigid nature of the road'. Some candidates considered the use of darkness and how this creates a sense of unease for both the passengers in the car and the reader. There were a small number of responses where ideas became too repetitive and the same point was reconsidered.

A range of terminology was used accurately and techniques were correctly identified, such as the use of personification, repetition, strong verbs and alliteration. Most commented on the use of structure and some explored the use of tenses.

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.

It is recommended that centres continue to make use of the *Sample Assessment Materials* and past papers. The grids in the mark schemes illustrate how the Assessment Objectives are assessed and the Indicative Content includes some suggested ideas of specific comments that may be made by the candidates. All valid points are awarded if supported with relevant evidence.

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.

Section B: Prose

A full range of marks was awarded and the majority of candidates gained marks in Level 3 or above. Responses were varied. Some candidates demonstrated a surface understanding of their two chosen texts, but sometimes responses were too brief, not detailed enough, took a narrative approach or there was an imbalance of coverage. Most candidates tended to make general points about their two chosen novels, but references to specific examples were often lacking. A number of candidates did not fully explore the writers' craft and comments in relation to language were often limited.

The bullet points in the mark grid reflect the requirements of the Assessment Objectives (AOs). If a candidate does not address all of the AOs sufficiently, a mark lower in the level is awarded. Candidates should compare their two chosen novels, provided a range of examples and included relevant contextual comment to support the points made. The more able candidates successfully embed contextual points and include evidence of wider reading, such as the views of critics.

Due to the very small number of entries and a small number of responses for each question, comments are based on the limited evidence seen and can only be included for the most popular questions.

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 show obstacles to a happy childhood.

Responses were varied and included a range of points. Most candidates compared *What Maisie Knew* with *Great Expectations* and points were made about their 'unfortunate and abusive situations'. For example, one candidate considered how Maisie's parents used their daughter as a 'shuttlecock' to send messages to each other and how this would have a harmful effect. Others considered both the positive and negative effects of different experiences during childhood, such as the young Pip's positive relationship with Joe and Joe's 'positive nurturing' compared with the negative nurturing experiences of Mrs Joe. There was comment about relationships, such as those between Maisie and Mrs Wix and Miss Havisham and Estella.
Occasionally, some points were generalised, incorrect or repeated and candidates did not include enough examples from their chosen texts. Contextual points were made about the authors' own unhappy childhoods

Question 3: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts explore moral issues.

Similar to Question 2, the small number of candidates who attempted this question provided a response to *What Maisie Knew* with *Great Expectations*. There was consideration of Maisie's parents' divorce, Ida's immoral 'parading with suitors' and her 'violently aggressive treatment of Maisie', Sir Claude's behaviour, Mrs Joe's use of her 'tickler', Pip's and Herbert's debts and the 'immoral manipulation' of Miss Havisham's treatment of Estella. At times, focus on the question was lost ideas were not always clearly conveyed.

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.* 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 invite the reader to make judgements about the societies presented in the novels.

The small number of responses tended to compare *The Handmaid's Tale* with *Frankenstein*. There were comments made in relation to the nature of both the dystopian and gothic novels and how a character's status and position in society promoted readers to form judgements about the societies presented in the novels. Some candidates

considered how contemporary audiences of the time of writing would have reacted and how this could be compared with a modern audience. Others explored the significance of appearances and how judgements about scientific development are formed.

There were those responses that did not explicitly refer to the question and others that relied too heavily on film interpretations.

Most candidates attempted to explore narrative structure and included some contextual comment in the response.

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 collection.

Question 8: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts portray family relationships as a source of conflict.

Again, there were very few responses but, on the whole, candidates wrote about *Wuthering Heights* and *Mrs Dalloway.* Most candidates successfully explored Mr Earnshaw's adoption of Heathcliff, Hindley and Catherine Earnshaw's reactions and went on to explore Hindley's revenge and cruel treatment of Heathcliff, particularly after the death of Francis. Further examples often included the relationships and tensions with the Lintons, Heathcliff's marriage to Isabella and Heathcliff's treatment of his son, Linton. When exploring *Mrs Dalloway,* candidates tended to focus on Clarissa's relationships with Elizabeth and Doris Kilman. Some wrote about Clarrissa's relationship with Peter Walsh. All relevant comments were credited. In one response, the candidate clearly struggled with ideas when writing about *Mrs Dalloway* and very little understanding of the novel was demonstrated. The occasional narrative approach hindered progression for some candidates.

General points about Section B

For most questions, there was evidence that candidates are now beginning to include comments in relation to each of the Assessment Objectives. In some instances, little comment was made about the structure of the novels or the writers' craft and some candidates did not analyse and explore the novel in enough depth and detail. 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. As in previous reports, guidance is provided in the specification but 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

This has been a small but successful series. We very much hope that both centres and students are pleased with their results.

Centres and candidates are offered the following advice for their continued future success. These are the same points as Summer 2018 but the advice remains unchanged:

- 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 A, Unseen Poetry, encourage candidates to demonstrate a brief or basic overarching understanding of the poem first before delving deeper for metaphorical meanings

- 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 WET03)
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