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Edexcel

Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel IAL

In English Literature (WET0 03)

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.

All candidates must answer Section A, Question 1, Unseen Poetry. Candidates then respond to a question from Section B, Prose.

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 Summer 2019 (1906) paper and performance

This has been a successful paper. There were no errors, no erratum notices and no changes made to the mark scheme.

The number of entries has continued to increase and we are hopeful this will continue to be the trend. As centres have become more experienced with the demands of the specification, the quality of candidates' responses has continued to improve as candidates are dealing with all of the Assessment Objectives.

For this series, a full range of texts had been studied and the full range of marks was awarded.

For Section A, Unseen Poetry, some responses were a little disappointing as students did not analyse the unseen poem in sufficient depth and detail. As commented last summer, some candidates explored the possible metaphorical interpretations of the poem, but had not looked for the most obvious meanings. Candidates would benefit from demonstrating their basic understanding of the unseen poem first before moving on and delving deeper for metaphorical meanings and offering alternative interpretations.

The most popular prose section was, once again, 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 sufficiently cover all assessment objectives thus preventing candidates receiving marks at the top of a particular level. 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.

There is still some evidence of responses that are not as fluent as one would expect at this level and some very brief, narrative responses were seen. The specification states that candidates are required to communicate fluently, accurately and effectively their knowledge, understanding and critical evaluation of texts.

For the prose section, many candidates were well prepared and met the demands of the question across the assessment adjectives. Some fell short on drawing out meaning, making short, surface comments on quotations rather than probing the construction of meaning in language. There were also many responses that lacked the expected knowledge of terminology and approaches to qualify for a mark in a higher level. There were also some excellent, crafted responses that were a joy to read. A number of candidates were awarded full marks for their Section B essays.

Marks are always applied positively, but 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.

The following explores each question in more detail.

Section A: Post-1900 Unseen Poetry

Question 1

The Unseen Poem for Question 1 was *Writing* by Andrew Motion. This was a successful poem, as it proved to be a good discriminator with a wide range of marks awarded. The most successful responses to the poem were those that covered all the assessment objectives and fully answered the question. Some students were able to write with sophistication and control, identifying specific strands within the poem and weaving their answers with probing and enlightening analysis of literary and linguistic techniques. Points, both in terms of when the poem was produced, its audience and purposes, and possible nuances of receptions were integrated skilfully into the points they made.

Some candidates struggled with the different narrative viewpoints of the poem. Some confused the speaker for the man's wife and others thought the man to be the wife, despite the man's letter beginning with 'Dear Madam' and later referring to 'he' and his request 'to bring me my wife'. Very few candidates commented on the hyperbole of a 'lifetime of rent' and how the main speaker had purchased the house from the man, whom we assume is in a nursing home. There were some misreading, but these responses also included some valid points that were awarded.

Some responses were rather brief, but understood the poem. Some recognised the main speaker's dilemma and how the man was not well and 'unstable' and possibly 'delusional'. A number of candidates commented on the poignancy of the poem and how the man has forgotten that his wife has died.

There were candidates who gained marks in the top level where they had fully engaged with the poem and delved deeper and employed knowledge of poetic terminology to effect, for example, some made comments about the 'interjecting writer', the poem beginning in *media-res*, how the monotony of the man's life is emphasised with alliteration, and many other examples. Those candidates who did particularly well commented on how the main speaker felt compelled to write back to the man in order to keep his hopes alive.

One examiner commented: 'I would recommend that students are encouraged to show they understand the poem as a whole and then use literary approaches and techniques to draw out how these meanings are created. I was delighted that there

were only a very few candidates in Level 1. Overall, the students were able to deal with the challenges of this question but some failed to understand what the poem was trying to convey.'

For the Unseen Poetry section, 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*, past papers and the mark scheme for this paper in order to become even 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.

Section B: Prose

A full range of marks was awarded for all questions. There were the very brief responses providing a surface reading of their chosen texts or a narrative overview through to the most impressive critical and evaluative essays, which were a delight to read. On the whole, centres should be congratulated for preparing their students so thoroughly for the examination.

A number of candidates in the top levels referred to their wider reading and a range of critics. Some candidates did not explore all assessment objectives, more often failing to comment on the writers' craft and comments in relation to language were often limited.

As included in a previous report, 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 is awarded lower in the level. Candidates should compare their two chosen novels, provided a range of examples from their chosen texts and included relevant contextual comment to support the points made. The more able candidates successfully embed contextual points and, where appropriate, include evidence of wider reading, such as the views of critics.

Examiner comments include:

“The most successful responses to these questions were those that spanned the range of the assessment objectives in a highly controlled and assimilated fashion. The students who achieved the highest marks skilfully integrated their points, kept to the question and conveyed an overview of the most important elements across the whole texts. These students used the techniques to explore meaning analytically. They then incorporated a considered discussion of contexts of production: relevant biographical detail, historical, social, political points integrated with precision in their analyses. They also, where pertinent, commented on how the texts may be viewed in contemporary society. They understood the form of each text and its place in create in meaning using relevant and specific terminology.”

“Most students covered the assessment objectives but without the cohesion and consistency required at the higher levels. Many students conveyed a good working knowledge of the texts and their contexts but perhaps ‘bolted on’ the contexts to their points rather than integrating them into an analysis of the question and techniques used. Many students failed to use the techniques they referenced to probe meaning, instead making short statements about meaning. Some responses were analytical with regard to their texts and their contexts but failed to incorporate sufficient subject terminology and approached to nudge above Level 3.”

“A very small number were unable to cope with the demands of the question, especially the requirement of AO4 to make connections across the texts. A few students simply lacked the necessary fluency or knowledge of the approaches required, some lacked knowledge of the texts themselves.”

“Overall, the weakest element across the cohort was in terms of using the relevant terminology. This is a difficult task for the time allotted and requires prior thought and focus on the question and how to respond across all the assessment objectives. Many responses used too few (or even no terms or genre related approaches) thus limiting themselves from Levels 4 and 5. This is a shame as overall the students wrote with flair and had wonderful ideas and interpretations of the texts they had studied.”

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 the movement from innocence to experience.

There were few responses for the *Growing Up* option but there was a balance in the number of responses for Questions 2 and 3.

A number of candidates compared *Great Expectations* with *The Color Purple*. The majority of candidates maintained a focus on the question and considered: Pip's growth and social awareness, the naivety of injustices of people in power, Celie's abuse and how her relationship with Shug Avery led to her own self-discovery; Pip's relationship with the convict and Pip's innocent ambition to acceptance and empowerment and many other valid points. Candidates commented on Dickens' use of irony and intent when criticising social injustices and Walker's use of language when describing Celie and, for example, how she is dehumanised by being called a 'mule'.

Successful answers made regular reference to the question, commented on writers' craft and incorporated contextual points into the response. Some candidates could have included more examples or coverage of their chosen novels.

Question 3: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts portray success.

This question saw some candidates gaining full marks. Most compared *Great Expectations* with *The Color Purple*. A full range of ideas were included in responses, including: how a strong belief in religion and faith helped Celie overcome her difficulties and become successful, how friendships helped others gain success, financial success, the preconceived notions of what success means, how characters cope with and overcome difficulties and how others are unsuccessful. Ideas were wide-ranging and varied.

Other points included: how Maisie matures throughout the novel and copes with her parents' divorce; Mrs Wix, who succeeds in gaining Maisie's respect and trust and Ida and Beale Farange's financial success. Some commented on how Magwitch became successful in Australia and one candidate considered Wemmick's relative 'success' and how he and his 'Aged Parent' live comfortably in their 'castle'. Some candidates commented on how in *The Color Purple* the women are successful, mainly focussing on how Celie overcomes adversity and becomes a successful businesswoman. Few commented on Shug's success as a performer or Nettie's eventual happiness.

A number of responses were very maturely expressed and candidates had addressed all of the assessment objectives.

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 disillusionment.

This was the most popular question for this collection of texts. Candidates tended to write about *Heart of Darkness* and *A Passage to India* and considered a range of different ideas, such as Marlow's initial optimism and the stark realism of his experiences in the Congo. Marlow's cynical views, eventual illness and recovery. How Kurtz is described as disappointingly 'hollow' by Marlow; Selvon's presentation of characters such as Galahad, Moses, Bart and others and how they are disillusioned by their experiences in London; Forster's Adela Quested and Mrs Moore who embark on a discovery of the 'real India' and become disillusioned by reality. Aziz's disillusionment with the British, how he is treated and his disappointment at how Fielding betrays their friendship by befriending Adela after the trial.

There were comments in relation to how some minor characters had become disillusioned by the actions of others or were the cause of others to become disillusioned, such as the Nawab Bahadur, who is so disillusioned, that he gives up his title in protest after Aziz's trial.

The majority of responses were maturely expressed and provided a number of examples from the chosen novels. Candidates mostly included contextual and writers' craft points and many referred to their wider reading.

Question 5: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts portray resilience.

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*.

Again, the candidates who attempted this question were mostly very successful with most responses being awarded a mark in the top two levels. Points included: In *Heart of Darkness* how Marlow is presented as a tough, independent and able man and consideration of Kurtz, who is treated as a hero for his resilience and almost worshipped as a god by the indigenous Africans. Those who studied *The Lonely Londoners* made reference to Selvon's Galahad, Moses and Bart and considered how they are resilient in their attempts to settle in London and their determination to survive and find contentment. In relation to *A Passage to India*, most candidates commented on Forster's Cyril Fielding, who demonstrates a resilient understanding of indigenous Indians and becomes a good friend to Aziz.

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 isolation.

Candidates fully engaged with this question and a full range of marks were awarded. There were a number of areas that candidates could consider, such as, in *Never Let Me Go*, how the students at Hailsham never leave until they reach adulthood and the lives of carers and donors. In *The Handmaid's Tale* the subjugation of women by men, women's loss of basic human rights such as not being able to vote, read or write leading to their feelings of alienation and isolation. Some considered Offred's isolating role as a Handmaid and her bare, isolated room at the Commander and Serena Joy's house. For *Frankenstein*, Victor's self-imposed isolation in his quest to create life, Walton's exploration of the Arctic, Elizabeth's isolation from Frankenstein, the creature's isolation when he is abandoned and his need of a companion.

Candidates often considered the physical and mental isolation of characters and how these experiences affected them. Others explored how the settings of the novels isolated characters and how these locations impacted on the novels.

Again, most candidates included some contextual details and commented on the structure of the novels. There were some responses that lacked development of ideas and more coverage of the novels was required.

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

Candidates responded with confidence to this question and, again, a full range of marks was awarded. The majority of candidates wrote about *Frankenstein* and compared this with one of the other two novels.

Most candidates concentrated on the inequality of the treatment of the protagonists in an unequal society. For example, in *Never Let Me Go*, how the carers and donors are cloned to provide body parts for the rest of society and how the carers and donors do not question their inequality or lack of opportunities. Madame is acutely aware of the inequality and her treatment of the students at Hailsham reflects this. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, candidates commented on Offred's inequality: and her enforced separation from her husband and daughter. Some considered how the Handmaids are indoctrinated and have no choice in serving as child bearers for elite couples. Others mentioned how Gileadean society is based on inequality – however, it was interesting to see how a number of candidates did not consider the stratification of Gilead's women. When considering *Frankenstein*, most commented on how the creature realises the inequality of his situation when he observes the

love and companionship enjoyed by the DeLacey family compared to the abandonment and isolation that he endures and when he is denied a companion.

Again, a number of candidates made reference to the most recent televised adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* directed by Bruce Miller (Hulu production), but must remember that their essay must be based on their reading of the novel.

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.

The most popular texts were *Wuthering Heights* and *Beloved*.

Question 8: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts portray weakness.

Candidates tended to respond to this question in a mature and detailed manner and a range of ideas were presented. Most considered both the psychological and the physical aspects of weakness. When considering *Wuthering Heights*, many commented on Catherine's indecisive nature and her seduction by the materialistic lifestyle of the Lintons and how Heathcliff is weakened by his obsession for Catherine.

For *Mrs Dalloway*, candidates considered Clarissa's weaknesses, such as her jealousy of Miss Kilman and Septimus's post-traumatic stress being a weakness as a result of his experiences during the war. Others considered Peter Walsh who is indecisive and accepts the very fabric of the society that he criticises. Peter is full of regret and bursts into tears in front of Clarissa. When considering *Beloved*, candidates considered Sethe being weak when she does not stand up to Beloved and retreats into herself to escape the memories of the past or Halle's, Sethe's husband, who weakly stands by when Sethe is violated or how by Sethe allowing Beloved to stay, it drives others away.

Question 9: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present mental entrapment.

Although the focus of the question is on mental entrapment, a number of candidates also considered the physical entrapment that many characters experience. On occasion, this led candidates losing focus on the question. However, the full range of marks was awarded and most candidates were able to write detailed essays in response to the question.

In response to *Wuthering Heights*, comments often included Brontë's presentation of the spiritual and mental entrapment of Heathcliff and Catherine together with the cruelty and humiliation experienced by the young Heathcliff and Hareton or when

the young Linton is brought to live at Wuthering Heights. Some considered Isabella Linton's disastrous marriage to Heathcliff.

Those who considered *Mrs Dalloway* considered Clarissa's angst and her feelings of entrapment as a wife, mother and socialite. There were comments in relation to Clarissa's feelings of mental entrapment, loneliness and failed communication. Candidates considered Septimus's inner turmoil and the lack of understanding he receives from the medical profession or how Lucrezia Smith experiences entrapment when caring for husband, who is mentally unable to share her worry and unhappiness. Some mentioned Sally Seton and Clarissa's relationship and the effect of their repressed sexual attraction for each other.

For *Beloved* most considered Morrison's presentation of Sethe and her mental entrapment and debilitating guilt over her infanticide and Beloved's presence. Candidates often considered the physiological enslaving and entrapment of slaves and integrated relevant contextual points.

Evidence of wider reading was more evident in these two questions. A number of candidates referred to a variety of literary critics, such as Lacan, Sanger, Kermode and Eagleton.

General points about Section B

Centres are reminded to advise candidates to deal with all 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. Some candidates do not compare the texts sufficiently and some deal with the novels separately. Those candidates who integrated comparisons throughout their essays tended to be more successful. Contextual referencing has improved, but in some cases, there were no contextual points or some were 'bolted on' and 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.

As in previous reports, context guidance is provided in the specification but is included here for ease of reference:

Guidance on AO3 (as included in previous reports)

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

Performance of this paper has been very pleasing and some excellent responses have been seen. Many candidates have gained marks in the top two levels and 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 and past papers 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 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.

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