



Pearson
Edexcel

Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2020

Pearson Edexcel IAL
In English Literature (WET01)
Unit 1: Post-2000 Poetry and Prose

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Introduction

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Standard Introduction

For this unit, WET01, the open book examination is 2 hours long and there are two sections.

All candidates must answer one question from a choice of two in Section A, Post-2000 Poetry. Candidates then respond to a question on their selected text from Section B, Post-2000 Prose.

For Section A, Post-2000 Poetry, students will use the reading skills they have developed through the course. Students will answer one essay question from a choice of two comparing a named poem from the prescribed list of poems from *Poems of the Decade: An Anthology of the Forward Books of Poetry* with another poem of their own choice from the prescribed list.

For Section B, Post-2000 Prose, students answer one essay question from a choice of two on the prose text they have studied. Students can select from the following titles: *The Kite Runner*, *Life of Pi*, *The White Tiger*, *Brooklyn* or *Purple Hibiscus*. Students should study their chosen text in detail. Student responses must also be informed by an appreciation of the contexts in which texts are written and read.

In studying for Post-2000 Poetry and Prose, students 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 25 marks available for Section A and 25 for Section B. The total mark of 50 represents 50% of the total IAS and 25% of the total IA2.

Section A, Post-2000 Poetry, assesses Assessment Objectives AO1, AO2 and AO4.

Section B, Post-2000 Prose, assesses Assessment Objectives AO1, AO2 and AO3.

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 WET01 January 2020 (2001) 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 for the January sitting 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 and candidates are generally dealing effectively with the range of Assessment Objectives.

For this series we saw students offering responses on all of the texts, though not all questions. The full range of marks was awarded.

For Section A, Post-2000 Poetry, some responses weren't up to standards as students did not analyse in sufficient depth and detail between the nominated poem and the poem of their own choice. It is important to note that AO4 is assessed in this section of the examination and that the connections between the poems therefore need to be explored and analysed. Candidates explored a variety of possible interpretations of the poems and the methods the poets had employed, but many did not look to provide a clear overview of what the poems might mean. Candidates would benefit from offering an exploration of the potential overall meanings of the poems they are writing about before moving on and delving deeper for metaphorical meanings and offering interpretations of the poems.

When it comes to writing about poets' methods, the range of poetic techniques to which some candidates referred was rather narrow (and also sometimes inaccurate). Candidates would benefit from being taught a wider range of the methods poets use to create meaning and would also benefit from being able to discuss a variety of the ways in which such methods might affect readers and the creation of meaning. Stronger responses were rooted in a firm sense of how the selected poems could be connected, either in terms of subject matter or of method. Stronger candidates were also able to offer effective insight into the ways in which poets create meanings and the kinds of methods they employ, as well as demonstrating the ability to write about how the form of the selected poems might affect meaning.

In Section B, the most popular prose text studied section was *The Kite Runner* (Questions 3 and 4) and the second most popular *Purple Hibiscus* (Questions 11 and 12). 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 (especially those writing on *Life of Pi*) who did not address context (AO4) and this inevitably had an effect upon their outcomes. Others who did not consider the variety of ways

in which meanings are shaped in literary texts (such as, but not limited to, writers' use of the language, structure and form of the texts); a particular issue centres might consider is how the novel as a genre functions and how candidates might be enabled to discuss such methods.

There is still some evidence of responses that are not as well developed or as fluent as would be expected at this level. Some responses were very brief and tended to be narrative in nature rather than exploring the meanings of the texts. The specification states that candidates are required to communicate fluently, accurately and effectively their knowledge, understanding and critical evaluation of texts.

For the Post-2000 Prose section, many candidates were well prepared and met the demands of the questions they answered across the Assessment Objectives. Some, however, tended to rely on under-developed, surface comments on quotations rather than exploring more thoroughly the ways in which language is used to forge meaning. When dealing with lengthy texts such as novels, it is important that candidates are able to talk about the patterns of language that writers develop across the text as a whole, rather than focusing narrowly on specific examples without wider reference to the language of the text. There were also many responses that lacked the expected knowledge of the terminology, concepts and approaches to qualify for marks in the higher levels. There were also some excellent, crafted responses that were a joy to read.

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.

Detailed Commentary on individual questions

Section A: Post-2000 Poetry

Question 1

The nominated poem for Question 1 was 'Fantasia on a Theme of James Wright' by Sean O'Brien. The poem was compared to a number of other poems from the anthology, the most popular being 'A Minor Role', 'Eat Me', 'From the Journal of a Disappointed Man' and 'Song'. Some of these poems lent themselves better than others to a discussion of 'the roles in which people are placed' and the combination of 'Fantasia on a Theme of James Wright' and 'A Minor Role' was particularly apposite in discussing the idea of roles. Some other poems such as 'Look We Have Coming to Dover!' were offered but comparisons were not always successful and seemed somewhat forced.

This was a successful question, as it proved to be a good discriminator with a wide range of marks awarded. The most successful responses to the question were those where candidates had approached the task with

comparison in mind and which drew on a variety of ways in which the poets create meaning. Some students were able to write with sophistication and control, identifying a variety of ways in which the poems dealt with different ways in which societal roles can be conceived and presented, offering interesting and appropriate analysis of literary and linguistic techniques. Weaker responses tended to adopt simplistic stereotypes.

Question 2

The nominated poem for Question 2 was 'Giuseppe' by Roderick Ford. Candidates by and large responded well to the ways in which 'death' is present in the poems, but fewer confidently addressed the full question stem which asked them to think about how 'ideas about death' are presented. Where candidates embraced the full implications of the question, they were able to engage with the nuances and ambiguities of the poems they had selected. Popular comparisons were 'The Gun', 'Eat Me' and 'The Lammas Hireling'.

This was also a successful question, and candidates received marks covering all levels; it proved to be a good discriminator of candidates' abilities. As with Question 1, the most successful responses to the question were those where candidates had approached the task with comparison in mind and which drew on a variety of ways in which the poets create meaning. Some students wrote effectively about the ways in which Ford seeks to create guilt around the idea of the death of the mermaid/woman and explored the ways in which the mass deaths of the World War II context for the poem might make a difference to how this event is perceived. Such candidates were able to write with sophistication and control, identifying a variety of ways in which mystery is conveyed and explored in the poems and offering effective analysis of both literary techniques and the poets' use of language.

General Observations on Section A

1. In stronger responses, candidates tended to offer a brief overview of how the named poem and their selected poem dealt with the topic of the question before proceeding to detailed analysis. This helped them to establish at the outset clearly how the poems they were writing about connected to the primary focus of the question, and also the ways in which they might connect to each other (this was especially important as AO4 is assessed in this section of the examination). The best candidates established a clear sense of how the poems related to the themes of their chosen question and then proceeded to explore the poets' literary approaches and techniques to draw out how meanings are created.
2. In the Post-2000 Poetry section, candidates are required to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the function of genre features and conventions in poetry. They also need to show knowledge and understanding of a range of ways to read texts,

including critical reading for detail of how writers use and adapt language, form and structure in texts. Stronger candidates had been effectively prepared in this area, but it was evident that some candidates were able to draw only on a very narrow range of poetic methods and were not always able to apply these in accurate or meaningful ways.

The Post-2000 Poetry questions assess Assessment Objectives (AOs) 1, 2 and 4:

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.

AO4: Explore connections across literary texts

Context is not assessed in Section A of the paper. However, candidates may wish to discuss the ways in which some key contexts help to shape meaning in texts (with reference to AO2).

Section B: Post-2000 Prose

The Kite Runner (Khaled Hosseini)

Question 3

This question was the less popular of the two. The rubric was generally understood by candidates. At a basic level, candidates tended explain the family relationships presented in the novel – especially those between Amir, Baba, Soraya, Hassan and Sohrab. As ever, the rape scene and the related abuse of Sohrab were a particular focus for discussion. Other candidates searched a wider range of ideas about family in the novel, such as Baba's relationship with his two sons, Amir's developing relationship with Sohrab, Amir's marriage to Soraya, and the extent to which the new family group at the end of the novel actually represents new possibilities. Higher ranking candidates were able to focus on the ways in which Afghanistan itself, with its developing political and religious conflicts, is in some ways a 'family' and how the more conventional family relationships presented reflect the political situation of the homeland. More able candidates considered the ways in which Hosseini writes about the problems of family and of Afghanistan more broadly. This illustrated deeper appreciation of the writer's potential intent and showed that these candidates understood that the novel is a literary construct. Some candidates lost their focus on family and produced answers focusing more on the characters of the novel.

For the most part, contextual knowledge was appropriate and underpinned responses.

Question 4

The question invited candidates to consider the idea of 'corruption' on two levels. There were good instances of candidates considering the extent to which corruption on these two levels was evident, and the extent to which corruption at these two levels interacts in the novel. It was also pleasing to see better candidates providing sophistication by considering Hosseini's style and focusing more on the structure of the text and the ways in which this affects readers' understanding of corruption in the novel. Again, as in Q3, however, there were candidates who resorted to a less effective character driven study. Such character-driven studies tended to show less attention to the range AOs. Candidates were, in general, able to make use of a range of appropriate contextual material to support their responses.

Life of Pi

Question 5

Some candidates took the question at face value and dealt purely with the novel's presentation of physical hunger. Many also went on, however, to present a more philosophical discussion and had obviously considered a variety of different ways in which the novel deals with ideas of hunger – such as spiritual hunger, hunger for the truth and emotional hunger. Sometimes philosophical content was presented at the expense of consideration of AO2 – the ways in which Martell shapes meaning in the novel – and relevant embedded evidence from the text was not always included. Context proved to be problematic, and many candidates had not taken enough time to consider the kinds of contextual material they might include and how it could contribute to their responses.

Question 6

Only one candidate responded to this question, so general comments are not appropriate.

The White Tiger (Aravind Adiga)

Question 7

On the whole, there were some very strong, competent answers in response to this question. Some candidates focused on how the novel deals with 'big' politics – the politics of political parties and the political interaction between nations. Some candidates also explored the idea of politics at a more local level – within families, relationships, local societies and so on. There was a sense of Balram's own 'political' position as an unreliable narrator and his

own personal (lack of) political morality. Candidates also, however, considered a variety of other characters who also relate to political ideas – The Great Socialist, Balram’s grandmother, Mr Ashok. Candidates generally focused effectively on contextual issues embedded in the novel, such as the caste system and inherent political and social problems in India. Some argued that political ‘morality’ was a luxury often dispensed with in characters’ (especially Balram’s) struggles to escape their situations in the ‘Rooster Coop’.

Question 8

Candidates answering this question offered a good variety of contextual material to underpin reading and analysis. By and large, candidates revealed a sound knowledge of the text and offered relevant illustrations from it to root their responses in Adiga’s novel. Some chose to explore the Balram’s flaws as an inevitable consequence of life in the ‘Rooster Coop’ and the caste system. Some focused on Adiga’s presentation of Balram’s relentless but misdirected energy and his damning view of Indian society. Some candidates provided details related to Adiga’s presentation of Balram’s home life. There was little comment on Adiga’s style of writing and the construction of the novel.

Brooklyn (Colm Toibin)

Question 9

There was general understanding of the question and most candidates displayed appropriate contextual knowledge of Irish economic problems and the social conditions of life in the United States in the 1950s. Some candidates made reference to the American dream, although this tended to be dropped in as a term without any significant attempt to explore what it might actually mean and how ideas associated with it might apply to the question of Eilis’ developing relationship with her homeland. Some candidates argued that going to America was a positive experience for Eilis, but maintained a sense that Ireland remains a significant influence upon her as the novel progresses. Comments were made on Eilis’ new-found confidence and her experience of life outside parochial Ireland particularly the ways she develops through meeting people of different nationalities, but that Ireland nevertheless remains a benchmark in her thinking. Some candidates tended to resort to a narrative approach rather than engaging in more targeted and developed discussion about Eilis’ experiences.

Question 10

No candidates answered this question, so general comments are not appropriate.

Purple Hibiscus (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie)

Question 11

Candidates answering this question were generally able to explore the significant differences between the two priests. A number of social, religious, historical and political contexts were offered as a means of illuminating Adichie's presentation and use of the two men. Some responses tended to adopt more narrative approaches, and candidates are reminded that this does not allow access to the higher levels of the Mark Scheme. Some responses were marked by lesser focus on how meanings are shaped in literary texts (AO2) and contexts (AO3). Some responses displayed a good knowledge of political events in Nigeria, using these events as suitable context for considering the role of religion in society and, therefore, of the two priests. Candidates displayed strong textual knowledge but did not always focus on Adichie's use of language and structure.

Question 12

This question required a recognition of developing awareness, and candidates explored this idea in relation to a good variety of the characters and situations of the novel. Kambili's and Jaja's experiences and the ways in which these may be understood were a regular focus, but the older characters were also often dealt with in useful and appropriate ways. Contexts relating to the wider world Adichie presents, including ideas of religion, national development, political corruption and education were all used as contexts that illuminated readings of the novel. Some candidates explored Jaja's and Kambili's experiences of growing up in a dysfunctional family and their ensuing growth in awareness. A number commented on the fact that *Purple Hibiscus* is a form of *bildungsroman*. Again, some candidates tended to offer a narrative approach.

General Observations on Section B

1. Marks across the levels were awarded as appropriate, but the small number of candidates responding to some questions means that not all levels were seen in relation to all questions. Responses ranged from very brief answers providing surface readings of texts or a narrative overview through to effective critical and evaluative essays. On the whole, centres are to be congratulated for preparing their students effectively for the examination.
2. A number of candidates in the top levels were able to refer to a range of contextual factors and the impact these had on their readings of the texts. Some candidates, however, did not explore all AOs (especially AO3, and particular in relation to *Life of Pi*).

3. There was a range of ability displayed in exploring the ways in which meanings are shaped in prose texts, but candidates performing in the lower levels demonstrated more limited ability to explore writers' craft. It is important to consider how writers use form (what is a novel, and how does it work?) and language across full texts. It is important in discussing writers' use of language that candidates demonstrate a knowledge of broader patterns of language use across the text as a whole rather than relying on isolated examples.
4. Bullet points in the mark grid reflect the requirements of the AOs and how effectively these are met at each level. Markers award marks according to a 'best fit' principle. Where candidates do not deal equally effectively with all of the AOs, or where candidates do not deal with an Assessment Objective at all, marks are used to reflect the balance of the candidates' achievements. Candidates should remember that they need to address contexts (both contexts of the production and of the reception of the texts) in a consistent and formative way throughout their answers in order to develop argument and to support the points they are making. More effective candidates successfully embed contextual material rather than providing it simply as additional and unrelated material.
5. The most successful responses to the questions in this section of the examination were those that spanned the range of the AOs in a controlled and integrated fashion. The students who achieved the highest marks skilfully developed arguments relevant to the questions they had selected and conveyed an overview of the text as a whole. The most effective responses also employed a variety of techniques to explore meaning analytically, incorporating considered discussion of contexts of production (e.g. relevant biographical, historical, social, religious, political or literary contexts) and contexts of reception (e.g. how contemporary views or events or textual adaptations) and the ways in which these contexts affect candidates' readings of the texts.
6. Less effective responses generally covered the AOs 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 tended to 'bolt on' contextual material rather than demonstrating how it affected and helped to shape readings of text. Centres are reminded that they could assist candidates by providing them with an understanding of the novel as a genre:
 - What is a novel?
 - How do novels work?

- What narrative and other methods do writers of prose fiction employ?
- How does use of language differ in the novel to in other genres?

Such insights would assist students in relation to both AO2 and AO3.

Paper Summary

Performance on this paper has been pleasing and some very good responses have been seen. Many candidates have gained marks in the top two levels and centres should be congratulated in preparing their candidates efficiently.

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

- address the AOs for the relevant sections of the paper and use mark schemes and past papers to guide teaching
- encourage candidates to use a range of literary concepts and terminology to identify ways in which writers create meaning; discuss the effect of these techniques might have upon readers
- demonstrate awareness that readers are individuals – not all readers will see things in the same way; develop language to reflect what readers may (or may not) feel or think or understand
- for Section A, Post-2000 Poetry, encourage candidates to demonstrate a basic overarching understanding of the poems they are writing about before launching into analysis
- for Section B, Post-2000 Prose, ensure that candidates make appropriate references to contextual materials 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, religious, geographical, etc. – that influence both the writer and the reader. It is important to remember that genre (poetry or the novel) is also a context and there is potentially much that candidates might say about this in relation to their selected texts. Context should be integrated and linked to the ideas and points being made, not simply bolted on as additional information – such bolt-on context does little to contribute to the creation of meaning.

- 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.

Thank you,

Principal Examiner
(IAL English Literature WET01_01)
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Grade Boundaries

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

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