



# Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2020

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.

## Overview of the specification

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.

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.

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 B Prose assesses AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO4

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.

AO3	Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received.
AO4	Explore connections across literary texts.

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 2020 (2001) paper and performance

Although there was a small entry, this has been a successful paper with a number of candidates achieving good grades. 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; however, due to the small entry number, comment is provided for the most popular questions.

The unseen poem for Question 1 was *Moving House* by Jacob Polley. This was a good, discriminating poem and a range of marks was awarded, with most placed in Levels 2-4. As in previous series, there were the simple surface readings through to the more developed responses. There was evidence of greater success this series, as more candidates explored the deeper and metaphorical meanings of the poem. The range of interpretations offered was varied and interesting and shall be discussed more later in this report.

In the prose section, the most popular choice of set texts was, once again, the *Science and Society* option (Questions 6 and 7). The most popular question was Question 7. The second most popular theme was *Growing Up* (Questions 2 and 3); however there were no responses to Question 5 in the *Colonisation and After* collection. Many responses gained marks in the top two levels, but some candidates did not consider all assessment objectives in sufficient detail. There were some candidates who did not consider context for both novels and others who did not give enough consideration of the writers' craft, such as the language, structure and form of the texts. The majority of candidates compared their chosen texts and they tended to maintain 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.

On the whole, written expression was clear with only the occasional essay that was difficult to follow the line of argument. In some instances, there was evidence of relying on the candidates' knowledge of film versions or television productions of the texts and this resulted in some inaccuracies. Candidates are expected to study their chosen novels in depth. There were a very small number

of candidates who did not deal equally with both texts and, on occasion, insufficient comparisons were made.

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. Those candidates who referred to their wider reading or to literary critics often performed exceptionally well, as they linked these concepts or quotations successfully to the question.

## Section A: Post-1900 Unseen Poetry

### Question 1

The unseen poem for Question 1 was *The Moving House* by Jacob Polley. This was a challenging yet successful poem, as the vast majority of candidates explored the poem in some detail and looked for alternative or metaphorical meanings, thus gaining marks in Level 3 or above. A full range of marks was awarded and very few responses were placed in Level 1. There were the simple surface readings, without any exploration for deeper meanings, through to the more developed, critical and evaluative responses.

A range of interpretations were given, such as the religious reading and ideas of moving on, starting afresh and having to leave memories behind. The poem considers the literal moving of a house and talks about taking the memories of the house with its occupants, and the metaphorical and emotional impact of leaving their house behind. The poem could be considered as an extended metaphor that possibly explores the plight of people forced to leave their homes when being 'utterly unprepared' or about displaced people or those affected by conflict: 'stars whistle over your head'. The poem suggests that old memories can be buried ('bury them') and new ones made: 'fashion new ones' the poet places emphasis on keeping 'perspectives true' when moving the windows and perhaps suggests that people should remain true to their convictions. There is a suggestion that the windows are fragile and could be torn easily and need to be gently placed 'on their fresh prospects'.

Some candidates were more successful than others when exploring the writer's techniques. Devices such as the simile, metaphor, alliteration, imperatives and adjectives were often included. Some commented on how the doors are personified, but very few considered the metaphor suggesting how they have provided protection in the past and should be looked after: 'they've leant so heavily against the world'.

There were just one or two candidates who considered how a sense of urgency in *Moving House* is conveyed ('so utterly unprepared', 'fumbled') or how there are time shifts: 'sky floods in', 'dark takes place', 'beginning of the day', 'afternoon' and 'stars'. Another rare point was the sense of danger that is created

when the 'wolves howl', the weather is harsh ('snow covered hills') and the 'stars whistle', which could possibly be in reference to missiles.

Comments were made about the speaker giving a set of instructions and how people may 'not have time to memorise' them. Very few commented on how the bath and electricity are zoomorphised, but some did suggest that the bath is likened to a dog and is lead out 'by the plug chain' or how a sense of violence is created when the speaker says that the electricity must be enticed out with 'a forked stick' and held down like a snake or how it is pinned 'to the ground by its throat'.

The majority of candidates considered the use of structure and identified the use of free verse; however, not many candidates considered possible reasons *why* the poet had chosen to structure the poem in five stanzas of eight lines such as, perhaps, it could be suggesting some order amidst the chaos. There was also the occasional comment about the use of caesura, enjambment and dashes to provide pauses, breaks and continuations to convey the speaker's continuous lines of thought.

There was just one or two of misreadings, such as one candidate who believed that the vase with its 'bouquet of wilted smoke' suggested that the link with flowers gave a happy or spring-like atmosphere to the poem.

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.

## Section B: Prose

A full range of marks was awarded and, once again, the majority of candidates gained marks in Level 3 or above. As in previous series, responses were varied. Some candidates demonstrated a surface understanding of their two chosen texts and, in other examples, too brief, not detailed enough, took a narrative approach or there was an imbalance of coverage. Some did not compare and contrast their chosen novels enough. Most candidates tended to make general points about their two chosen novels, but references to specific examples were often lacking.

Approaches to the writers' craft has gradually improved with many candidates successfully considering structure or narrative voice of the prose texts; however,

few candidates explore the specific words or phrases used to support their ideas. More exploration of the writers' craft would benefit some candidates' responses.

As mentioned on previous reports, 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 often awarded, but marks are always applied on a 'best fit' basis. 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 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 explore how young people learn to survive the damage inflicted on them.

*Great Expectations* is clearly a popular text option and this was mostly compared with *The Color Purple*. On occasion there was an imbalance of coverage, but candidates did tend to compare and include contextual points in their essays. Typical comments included: Maisie being forced to survive her parents' divorce and neglect of her, Maisie accepting and internalising her situation, Pip's interactions with the convict and how he survived the convict's threats by stealing from his sister's pantry, the use of Mrs Joe's 'tickler', the younger Miss Havisham surviving being jilted and how she seeks revenge; various points about how Celie experiences physical and mental abuse and how she learns to survive.

More examples and details from both novels would have benefitted some responses, but responses were varied and candidates engaged with the question.

Question 3: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present contrast in the attitudes of the older and younger generations.

Most candidates answering this question gained marks in Level 3 or above. On occasion, focus on the question was not maintained and some responses were rather brief or ideas lacked development. Points included: Maisie's relationships and interactions with her parents, Mrs Wix, Miss Overmore and Sir Claude and how these reflect social expectations and behaviour; the differing attitudes of Pip and his sister, Joe, Magwitch, Miss Havisham and Estella, but very few considered Herbert or Wemmick and his 'Aged Parent'; the contrast in attitudes between Celie and Alfonso, Nettie, Shug and Celie, but there were no comments in relation to the contrasting attitudes of Miss Millie and her daughter, Eleanor Jane, to illustrate changing points of views and social expectations of the time.

## 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 use locations that make a significant contribution to the novels.

The majority of candidates compared *The Handmaid's Tale* with *Frankenstein*. A range of ideas were included in responses, such as the contrasting locations within novels: Hailsham, the cottages and the donor recovery centres contrasting with the open countryside in *Never Let Me Go*. How Hailsham is secluded and idyllic and is where Kathy and her friends live for 16 years. Hailsham is a place of safety, but once Kathy moves away from it she can never relocate it. The Cottages are a contrast to Hailsham, as they are uncomfortable, run-down and lack heating in order to prepare the students for the harsher realities of their lives; in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the setting of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the totalitarian, dystopian Republic of Gilead where there is a return to 'traditional values' and the subjugation of women by men, is in contrast to former lives of freedom. Offred's basic and sparsely furnished room at the Commander's house contrasting with the hotel room at Jezebel's; in *Frankenstein* the frozen waters of the Arctic contrasting with the romantic settings of Europe. A range of European locations were considered, including: Geneva, the Alps, France, England, Scotland and the university at Ingolstadt, Germany.

In a small number of responses, candidates spent too long on the introduction but most went on to explore and compare a number of locations in the two novels. One candidate made some very good, discriminating points about the narrative structure of *Frankenstein* and how different narratives are set in different locations. There was also consideration of how life decisions are made when travelling to different locations.

Candidates often included some contextual points, but on occasion did not the writers' craft.

### Question 7

This question asked candidates to compare the ways writers present injustice in their novels. This was the most popular prose question. There were comments in relation to the injustices of misogyny in *The Handmaid's Tale* compared with the aesthetic prejudices in *Frankenstein* and a wide range of other ideas, including: how the clones had no options in life, how Kathy and Tommy could not get a deferral or how Tommy faces injustice at Hailsham in *Never Let me Go*; how Offred is separated from her husband and child and being forced to become a handmaid, the lack of freedom for the handmaids and the threat of the ever watchful Eyes, the Particulations and Salvagings and other points in *The Handmaid's Tale*; the injustices of how the creature is treated by his creator,



Justine's trial, the treatment of the DeLacey family, the deaths of William, Elizabeth and Clerval and the creature's revenge in *Frankenstein*.

Candidates engaged with the question and most were very successful. There was evidence of crafted responses where candidates included embedded quotations, supported ideas with relevant contextual points and, on occasion, referred to their wider reading.

## General points about Section B

There is evidence that candidates are considering the Assessment Objectives more and are making some comments in relation to the writers' craft and context when comparing and contrasting their two chosen texts. On occasion, contextual points were made just about one of the texts studied. There were some candidates who did not compare the novels enough and handled them separately. Comparisons should be integrated and candidates should be encouraged to compare the novels throughout the essay, not just in the introduction and conclusion.

## 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:

- continue focussing on the Assessment Objectives and develop skills of integrating points about the writers' craft and context (Section B)
- 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. Encourage candidates to suggest reasons *why* a particular technique has been used
- 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 throughout the essay
- as commented in previous series, 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 and make more reference to the question. Narrative approaches are rarely successful

- enjoy reading and writing and share enthusiasm with the examiner.

Thank you,

Principal Examiner  
(IAL English Literature WET03)  
January 2020

### Grade Boundaries

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

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