

Examiners' Report/  
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2016

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE  
in English Literature (4ET0)  
Paper 02

Edexcel Certificate  
in English Literature (KET0)  
Paper 02

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Centres are thanked for choosing Edexcel for their IGCSE English Literature provider. We very much hope that both our candidates and centres are pleased with their results.

The feedback received from examiners has been very positive and a full range of marks has been awarded.

## **Introduction**

This series has, once again, been very successful with a large number of entries this year.

There are two sections in the exam paper, equally weighted. In Section A, candidates have a choice between the unseen poem and the unseen prose extract. In Section B, they can choose Question 3, which has two named poems or Question 4, in which one poem is named and the candidate chooses a suitable poem to discuss with it. All questions carry 20 marks; 40 in total.

In both sections a full range of marks were awarded. Responses varied from the very brief and basic to the fully developed assured and perceptive. Overall, the quality of responses across the paper was very good, with some noticeably outstanding answers. Responses for Section A often seemed to be stronger than the taught poems in Section B, with a number of candidates continuing on extra paper.

From series to series, strengths vary. This time, the responses to Section A seemed to be a little stronger than those to Section B. Many examiners have expressed that they thought that the unseen poem gave plenty of opportunity for all candidates to gain some marks and to access the full spectrum of marks. It became very apparent that many candidates struggled with *Sonnet 116* (Section B) and there was often a misreading of the poem's meaning.

One examiner commented: "On the whole candidates seemed to fare better with Section A than Section B. In some cases there was a sense that the seen poems had not been taught in much depth. There were lots of instances where candidates hedged their bets about what they were saying 'perhaps the poet means this... it seems that the poet is saying this...' followed by vague or inaccurate comments on the poems. Another main issue with Section B was that candidates were often happy to give the 'story' of the poems and even a detailed background about the poets, the period the poem was written etc, but were lacking in ability and confidence in exploring and discussing structure, form, language and any techniques or devices employed by the poet. They might supply commentary about how

the poem made them feel but did not consider how the poet had achieved this effect on the audience.

Conversely, some candidates used 'wildly advanced' technical vocabulary in an attempt to sound as if they were confident in appraising a poem, but sadly they were not. As I have said in previous series, it would be more helpful if teaching and learning covered how the poet achieves an effect on the reader and the themes/language/devices/structure of the poems."

Another examiner commented, "A lot of good responses were seen to Section A in both questions and the trend was more encouraging in terms of candidates being able to relate their understanding and location of features and structure on how this affects the reader and how the poet/author *uses* these devices or tools."

### **Section A Unseen Texts**

For this series, there were more responses to the unseen poem than there was to the unseen extract. For both, the full range of marks was awarded.

Careful close reading of the unseen poem or extract is essential in this part of the paper. Some candidates had not read the materials closely enough or had not supported their ideas with relevant examples from the chosen text.

### **Question 1 Unseen Poem: *One Art* by Elizabeth Bishop**

**Question: *How does the writer deal with the subject of loss in this poem?***

By far, this was the most popular option for Section A with 23384 responses on ePen. Possibly, this is due to more coverage of poetry in the classroom and candidates feel a little more confident when analysing an unseen poem as they transfer their skills more easily.

*One Art* proved to be a really accessible poem for students of all abilities, proving to be a good discriminator; some students wrote exceptionally well. All lower-ability students were able to grasp the meaning of losing 'something' and wrote about the poet trying to say 'it doesn't matter' or 'that's life'. Higher ability students linked the regular structure to the cyclical nature of life, and that it is a natural part of life to lose things. The more able students linked the change in the structure in the final stanza to the possibility that the poet felt differently about losing 'you' compared to how she felt about the other things she had lost, but with a tone of resignation. There was quite a lot of misreading over the word 'further' and many students wrote that the poem was about the loss of her father.

One examiner commented: "This is one of the most effective pieces I can remember in terms of its providing something for everyone. There were very few candidates who appeared to be overwhelmed by the intricacies of the poem whilst the more able had ample opportunities to demonstrate the depth of their understanding. There were, therefore, very few complete misreadings: some thought the poem was about the onset of dementia; a few believed 'losing farther' referred to the loss of a parent."

Another examiner commented, "There were two passages which gave a clear indication of the students' relative capabilities of perception and understanding. The first was the allusion to the loss of 'cities ...realms....rivers' and 'a continent'. A proportion chose not to attempt any interpretation; for those that did a popular choice was that these were metaphorical losses, e.g. that the loss of a continent was a metaphor for the loss of important family members. Surprisingly few came up with the more plausible explanation of moving home or country. The final verse proved to be an even better discriminator. Many, perhaps most, identified the loss of a loved one but only the best picked up on the significance of the insertion of 'too' in 'not too hard to master' or the phrase '(Write it)'."

Some candidates offered some perceptive ideas. One response even considered how the losses were like those of Queen Victoria's – and how she had 'lost continents' and perhaps how Queen Victoria could never accept the loss of Albert. Responses were interesting and varied and all suggestions, if supported with relevant evidence were awarded.

Overall, comments included:

- generally done fairly well with many gaining marks in Level 3 or above
- a very high number felt that the poem was about dementia. Sadly, this argument did not work too well and there was little evidence to back up their idea and the response as a whole suffered for it. One examiner commented: 'I did, however, see two candidates who followed this train of thought and 'managed to pull it off' rather well (suggesting the persona felt a little depressed at 'the forgetfulness of old age')
- most candidates were able to comment successfully on the idea of loss but many felt that the poet just did not care about loss at all, and failed to engage with the change in tone later in the poem
- 'farther' caused a few problems - read as father by a significant number of candidates which in some cases took them down a route of the poem being all about the loss of a father
- weaker candidates were able to pinpoint the rhyme of 'master' and 'disaster' and make a relevant comment.

## Question 2

### ***Extract from: A Kestrel for a Knave by Barry Hines***

**Question: Explain how the writer shows Billy's desperate search for Kes in this extract.**

There were 8424 ePen responses to this question.

In response to this extract very few candidates indeed failed to demonstrate at least a basic grasp of the fundamental elements of the passage. Most dealt adequately with the language and imagery of the piece, commenting upon the hostile nature of the environment and Billy's discomfiture and clumsy movements. Some examiners have commented that the discrimination between the relative performances of the students was more a matter of the depth and detail of the responses and their organisation rather than insights into the subtleties of meaning and understanding.

One examiner commented: "Students generally didn't do so well (at higher levels) with the extract as they did with the poem. I certainly didn't come across as many who got Band 5 marks, compared with Q1. Plenty of students were hitting Level 3 though, and here in the middle I felt students did a better job than with the poem. Certainly the Level 3 responses found it easier to support their responses with a range of relevant examples, and were able to deal with structure and form more soundly. All students recognized the desperation and panic in Billy, and how this was shown through language, structure and form."

Another examiner commented, "More able students picked out the heartbreak for Billy (and the reader) when he realized he was back where he started. The more able students wrote about how the 'pat, pat, pat' of the rain was echoed with the one line stanza 'Kes, Kes, Kes'."

Overall, comments included:

- fewer candidates chose this response but when they did choose this question they were successful at it
- lots of personal engagement with 'Billy' and a lot of responses showed an immersion into the whole atmosphere of the piece and Billy's frantic search
- several very good responses and these higher level scripts included many devices, structure and language points with solid connection to the reasons why Hines had used them
- less able candidates were able to pick out some key features and how they made them feel as a reader.

## Section B

Of the two Anthology questions, Question 4 was more popular, but not always the most successful option for candidates. There was a reasonable balance of responses for Question 3 and Question 4. Some candidates struggled with the understanding of the poems other than at face value which, at times, was not always accurate.

Although there is no requirement to compare and contrast the poems for the current specification, a considerable majority of candidates did so. Some centres have sought clarification during the year and therefore this serves as a reminder for all centres. For the current specification, the two poems **do not** have to be compared, but there should be some balance in the treatment of the two. It seems that in some cases, candidates were constrained by trying to find comparatives when they did not need to do this. I should like to draw all centres' attention to the third bullet in each of the marking levels. The bullet states that either *Limited, Some, Sound, Sustained* or *Perceptive* 'connections are made between particular techniques used by the writer and presentation of ideas, themes and settings'. It is important to note that this refers to each individual 'writer' and the 'connections' means that the candidate understands how the writer uses techniques to convey his or her ideas for each separate poem. 'Connections' is not an alternative for 'compare'. However, this is also a timely reminder that for the **new specification** (from 2018), **comparisons will be required**.

It was certainly not unusual to find candidates had coped in a more accomplished manner with the unseen poem or extract than they did with the taught Poetry Anthology. As these were poems that candidates should have previously studied, it became evident that in some instances not enough time had been spent studying or revising them in preparation for the examination. Some candidates made a genuine attempt to answer a Section B question, but responses suggested that some poems had not been studied and were being attempted as unseen texts; however, it was refreshing to find very few 'nil returns' this series and almost all candidates attempted a response.

Centres are reminded that candidates should discuss the language, structure and form in both of the poems (they should structure their responses as they do for Section A, Unseen Poetry). Often, candidates will consider how the ideas are conveyed through language, but do not consider the structure and form. If candidates do not consider the structure and form, a mark lower in the level is applied. It is advised that centres look carefully at the mark grids and the wording in each bullet. The second bullet in each mark band is assessing the candidate's knowledge of the language, structure and form.

## **Section B Poetry Anthology**

There was a reasonable balance of responses for Section B Anthology questions. Quite interestingly, Question 4 had slightly more, which is unusual. There were 12773 responses to Question 3 and 18066 responses to Question 4.

### **Question 3**

#### **How are women presented in *La Belle Dame sans Merci* and *Poem at Thirty-Nine*?**

Again, a full range of mark was awarded for this question.

An examiner commented: "On the whole, students knew these poems well and were able to write confidently about them. They picked out the obvious differences in the way women are presented and how the men in the poems feel about the women. Having two poems to write about gave weaker students a chance to write more quantity than they did in Q1 or 2. All students were able to write about language at some level or other, but still struggled to comment on the effect of form and structure. Plenty of students knew that they had to include structure and form, and just made brief observations about stanza numbers or rhyme scheme. As with question 4, many students chose to compare the two poems, and on the whole this negatively affected the quality of analysis."

Another commented: "Perhaps unsurprisingly candidates seemed generally more confident and assured in their handling of 'Poem at Thirty-Nine' rather than 'La Belle Dame sans Merci'. A problem that arose, however, was that a considerable proportion of students felt it was incumbent on them to compare and contrast the two poems. With two such very different poems this often caused problems, although I was impressed by the number of candidates who managed to produce plausible points of similarity. I wonder whether it might not be a good idea to make clear in the rubric that there was no requirement to compare the two pieces. A second difficulty was that many students seemed to have only a rudimentary knowledge of the poems; quite disturbing for a taught anthology. Where good teaching was in evidence it made a huge difference."

### **Question 4**

#### **Show how the poets convey their feelings about love in *Sonnet 116* and one other poem from the Anthology.**

Q4 - The main poems chosen as the 'one other' were *Poem at Thirty-Nine*, *My Last Duchess*, *Remember* and *Mother in a Refugee Camp*. It seemed there was quite a lot of misunderstanding in relation to *Sonnet 116* with



students writing about love not being true. With this poem, compared to Q3 many students wrote much more about structure and form explaining (in quite a lot of detail) the structure of a sonnet. Again, many students wrote a comparison piece which often detracted from their ideas. A noticeable number of students only wrote about one poem - and often in these cases it was not the named sonnet, rather the poem of their choice.

One examiner commented: "The value/necessity of good teaching was again very apparent in the discussions of *Sonnet 116*. Where this was evident weaker students were able to pick their way through a quite challenging poem, whilst the most able produced some superb writing that was a joy to read. Others struggled to make any sense of the entire poem.

Another commented, "*Remember* and *My Last Duchess* were the most popular (and sensible) choice of a second poem, although all the other poems mentioned in the Mark Scheme had their adherents. Once again, most felt an obligation to write a critical comparison of the poems. This, however, was far less of a problem given that there was a far wider choice of suitable poems, although I did get the impression that a number of students choice of second poem was influenced by its suitability for comparing and contrasting."

There were a large number of 'unidentified' scripts, where candidates had not crossed the relevant question box. 677 for Section A and 1646 for Section B. Centres are urged to remind their students to cross the question number attempted.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, this has been a very successful paper and a full range of marks has been awarded across all questions, with many candidates gaining full marks.

Where candidates were less successful, literary devices had either been identified without explanation or were simply listed. Greater success would be achieved if candidates analysed specific areas of the text and developed their ideas, supporting them with relevant examples. 'Feature-spotting' is no substitute for detailed analysis. The ability to examine the writer's methods and to connect these with the ideas and feelings in the poems were often the most successful responses. More comment relating to the effect on the reader would have benefited some candidates' responses.

The handling of form and structure was often disappointing. For Section A there was often a mention of stanza, rhyming schemes and repetition, but comment was often minimal as to how these contributed to the thoughts and feelings in the text. In some cases, particularly for Section B, candidates had not considered structure and form at all.

Students should be reminded that they must write about two poems in Section B and, for each poem, they should consider the language, structure and form when answering the question.

Centres are advised to make greater use of past papers and Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs), available on-line, in order to make candidates more aware of question format and structure.

In some cases, more time needs to be given to the teaching of the *Anthology* poems in order to allow candidates the opportunity to access the full range of marks available. There was evidence of accomplished work produced during the examination and many centres should be congratulated on the thorough preparation of their candidates.

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Thank you.

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