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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2018

Pearson Edexcel IGCSE

In English Literature (4ETI) Paper 02R: Modern
Drama and Literary Heritage Texts

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The paper consisted this year of a relatively small entry as the legacy paper, 4ET0 ran its last series. In Section A, it was pleasing to see that the majority of candidates saw the plays as drama rather than referring to them as books or novels. Some offered sensitive reference to specific performances that they had seen, on stage or in film, alongside exploration of the text.

All questions that attracted answers performed well. AO1 was a strong feature of both Sections A and B with most responses demonstrating at least sound knowledge and understanding of the texts studied. AO2 discussion varied more across answers with some candidates limiting themselves to a peripheral approach such as identifying a technique without placing it in context or using it to respond to the question. A number of Level 4 responses were seen with thorough application of analytical detail and a convincing critical style. At Level 5, some very impressive responses were seen that used deep understanding of analytical approaches to perceptively respond to the question. Sophisticated exploration of AO2 led to some poised and lucid work with many achieving full marks.

In terms of AO4 on the Section B, Literary Heritage section of the paper, some candidates performed very well, integrating relevant and purposeful detail about the influence of context into their answers. Others effectively applied context details as an 'add on' or afterthought to their essay which was a much less successful approach. Some candidates did not include any reference to aspects of context at all, even though it is equal as an assessment objective to both AO1 and AO2 in the specification and mark scheme. It is worth noting that literary context is valid as an approach e.g. with reference to tragedy, genre and literary motifs alongside social, cultural and historical context.

Question comments

A View from the Bridge

1. The question allowed candidates to write about what they knew about the brothers, Marco and Rodolfo. There was a suggestion of structure inherent in the question and this prompted a reasonable balance of comments on each brother. Most candidates resisted the temptation to fall into narrative and, because they were prompted to consider language, form and structure, most answers paid detailed attention to aspects of the text through close reference and apt quotation.

2. The task of exploring the presentation of 'different kinds of love' resulted mainly in a close examination of Eddie's feelings for his niece and Catherine's new-found love for Rodolfo. More sophisticated responses included the painful, unrequited love Beatrice feels for Eddie, the brothers' love and support for each other and their love for Sicily with some comparing this to Rodolfo's new love for America.

An Inspector Calls

3. The question invited candidates to discuss how social class is presented and the majority of candidates offered explanations of how the Birlings demonstrated an upper class and elitist attitude through their words, attitudes and actions. The

use of examples further supported the success of these responses through close attention to language and effect.

Some candidates were uncertain of the exact meaning of 'social class', which is surprising because it is a central concept in the play. A number of responses reflected this uncertainty, including assertions that the Birling's were 'working class' and Eva Smith was 'the working poor'.

There was speculation about the Inspector's status and his 'classlessness'. Some candidates observed that Mr Birling was his wife's social inferior and gave examples of how this was expressed through his words and attitudes.

4. There were some strong responses to this question which caught the interest of candidates who related to the idea of Eric being portrayed as a weak character. There were comments on stagecraft and, for example, the impact of Eric's many entrances and exits. Comments on language focused on the change in Eric as he throws off much of the influence of his parents and the expectations of his social class and becomes more passionate, direct and confronts the issues that he has previously hidden from.

The quality of responses for this question was high, with some carefully-considered view of what made Eric appear weak as well as responses that weighed up whether or not Eric was, in fact, weak or not. An equal number of candidates argued that the character's dependency on alcohol was or was not a sign of weakness. Some argued that it was a sign of moral weakness. Others argued that Eric was driven to his dependency through being keenly aware of the wrongs in society and it was a sign that he was, more than others in the Birling family, sentient and conscious of his guilt and responsibility.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time

5. Whilst there were insightful comments on Judy Boone and detailed comments on her interactions with Christopher throughout the play, some responses simply noted the series of events. Many candidates noted how she is the 'refrigerator mother' who is shown to be responsible in part for Christopher's difficulties and in this way she is 'important' to the play.

Other candidates were able to articulate a view that the character functions mainly through her absence and distance, for example through a letter to Christopher. This idea was continued by some into an analysis of how Judy reveals Christopher's issues – perhaps through having played a part in increasing his problems but also through her inability to cope with and be a parent for him. In this way, candidates more successfully fulfilled the remit of the question, which was to explore the character's importance.

6. There were many responses in which the candidate tracked Christopher's experience of growing up and did so in a detailed way. There were good comments on elements of stagecraft, references to the impact on the audience and the use of narrative monologue to allow the audience to reflect on what they see happen before them. There were some tricky issues for candidates when explaining Christopher's experience of growing up and what he looked forward to. Part of this was about the challenge of relating to Christopher's thinking and

in part it was also an issue of maturity of expression and understanding of the complex issues involved in appreciating the character's view of the world. There was some resort to describing Christopher's experiences and aspirations in a blunt way - as 'not normal'. This have been an error of expression but it could be equally likely that it was a misunderstanding of the intention of presenting the audience with the idea of normality as a subjective concept and perhaps relating to Christopher and understanding him a little more successfully as a result.

Kindertransport

No answers were seen to this text.

Death and the King's Horseman

9. Very few answers were seen to this question. Those who answered used the stimulus quotation to build relevant arguments related to Olunde's impact in the play and his importance to its themes and ideas. The 'How far do you agree...' element provoked some interesting comments and originality of thought.

10. There were very few answers to this question. The idea of power was related largely to the power of ritual and Elesin's power at the beginning of the play. One answer explored how power shifts in the play and commented on the power of the English colonialists over the Yoruba.

Romeo and Juliet

11. Articulating what was comic about the characters of the Nurse and Mercutio was a challenge for many candidates. The question helpfully suggested a structure for the response, which many candidates seized. Generally, candidates had more to say about Mercutio than the Nurse and found it easier to explain the nature of the comedy offered by Mercutio, referring to his wordplay and Queen Mab speech. Candidates had less to say about the Nurse as the comedy offered is less sophisticated and layered than Mercutio's. However, there was an opportunity to compare (wit, innuendo, word-play) and contrast (dark humour, self-effacing humour, deliberate self-parody versus appearing to be unknowingly ridiculous and sentimental) the comedy associated with the characters and their functions in the play.

Close reference when discussing Mercutio was more confidently handled and explored than the language of the Nurse. However, the Nurse is a character most candidates were able to readily place within the social and historical context with ease.

12. This question proved a popular choice by candidates answering on this text. It was handled well because candidates generally dealt with language, form and structure effectively. Apart from some 'listing' of everything to do with Fate in the play and making a brief observation on each, candidates mostly avoided retelling the plot. Observations about 'Fate' did not always discuss the importance of Fate, thus missing some of the point of the question. There were some helpful discussions related to context, considering the role of fate in the tragedy and Elizabethan beliefs in astrology and superstition.

Macbeth

13. This was a popular question and some varied and interesting pairings of characters were evident in response to this question. The choice allowed candidates to play to their knowledge of characters and the whole text. Characters seen included: Duncan and Malcolm, Duncan and Banquo, Duncan and MacDuff and (less conventionally) Macbeth and Banquo. This last combination was unexpected but the small number of candidates who made this choice made it work for them by discussing 'Brave Macbeth' as a heroic and morally good character at the start of the play.

Candidates worked with this task in interesting ways, engaging in diverse issues in relation to the characters, such as determination, generosity and masculinity as positive and morally good aspects presented in the play. Where context was included, candidates considered the Divine Right of Kings amongst other features.

14. The character of Lady Macbeth received a good deal of attention from candidates keen to explore the presentation of fear. In association with Macbeth, candidates explored the fears that are phantoms and 'unreal spirits', dreams, hallucinations and visions that come with the guilt and abandonment of conscience. Highly effective responses tracked the presentation of fear through the words and stagecraft. Moving on to discuss the events of the final scenes, candidates discussed Macbeth's fatal absence of fear that came from his reliance on the weird sisters' false and deceptive prophecy. They contrasted this lack of fear with the paranoia, overwhelming denial and final collapse of Macbeth when his worst fears are abruptly understood.

Awareness of the social and historical context of the play tended to be sharp; candidates brought forward relevant comments about the prevailing fear of witches, the fear of traitors, the contemporary Gunpowder Plot and the intention in the play to give a warning to any who considered turning against the divinely appointed king.

The Merchant of Venice

15. The contemporary view of same-sex relationships tended to dominate some responses where a literal interpretation of Antonio's professed love for Bassanio became the main focus of the response. Applying a modern view of the relationship without the balance necessary when discussing the ethics and beliefs of a different social and historical culture was limited in its value. Where this was to the exclusion of every other instance, the responses were unbalanced and lacked a breadth of understanding of the theme because it did not account for the context of the play in its age. In most responses there was a range of comment exploring the theme; love between family members, self-sacrificing love, love of money and romantic love. Of these, less attention was paid to avarice.

Engaging exploration of what constitutes true love encompassed the relationships between Antonio and his friend and Bassanio and Portia. The intentions at work in both relationships are somewhat muddled by the love of (or

need for) money; this was not explored by candidates beyond a basic level. Some comment addressed Bassanio's debt '...in money...and in love' without making a comparison or reaching a conclusion by explaining how this links with the theme of love. Some candidates chose to consider the relationship between Jessica and Shylock with some sensitive and detailed exploration of fathers and daughters. Some touching personal reference was seen regarding the exchange of Leah's ring for a monkey and what this said about the transient and sometimes shallow nature of love.

16. Antonio's presentation at the start and the end of the play formed the basis of most who answered on this question; unpaired, sad and lonely. Many candidates saw his munificence towards his friend Bassanio as 'sad' or 'misguided'. Candidates found it hard to say why Antonio is so sad and many did not go further than discussing the possible reasons for his sadness. There was of course another level to discuss here; how Antonio views himself as an actor playing a part.

This is one of the occasions when a character addresses the audience and draws attention to the conceit that he is a character in a play (or like an actor in a play) choosing to play the sad role. Candidates wrestled with the idea that Antonio was depressed, lonely, inconsolable and that his love for Bassanio was unrequited and frustrated. Bringing an understanding of 'the humours' and how this view of character and temperament would have progressed this discussion, as would noting how Antonio's character demonstrates how wealth had not brought him happiness.

Pride and Prejudice

17. There were relatively few responses to this question. Some candidates stumbled when attempting to access details, finding it difficult to relate their knowledge of the play to aspects of social and historical context. Whilst not unsuccessful, the question challenged candidates' ability to succinctly and accurately articulate the nature of Mr Wickham's relationships with Lydia and Georgiana as well as how Mr Darcy intervenes to rescue Lydia Bennett from a ruined reputation. Some candidates chose to explore the relationship between Mr Wickham and Elizabeth as the main focus of their answer with some success.

There were also some excellent responses where close reference to the text and discussion of Wickham's relationships were handled expertly. In terms of context, some candidates wrote knowledgeably about the futures for young men with no independent fortune.

18. Discussions of the place of love in marriage brought forward candidates' knowledge of the expectations of that time. Some successfully considered the satirical nature and intentions of the comments made by characters regarding the place of love in marriage. A few candidates took issue with the pragmatic statements about love being unnecessary in marriage, seeing the statement at face value. Some responses deftly addressed the statement, using examples from the novel and expressing a clear understanding of the values and intentions of the author. This led to pithy and insightful comment on how the novel

presents materialistic and spiritual values as well as a range of attitudes – some pragmatic – towards the institution of marriage.

Great Expectations

19. There were very few answers to this question. Those seen considered Magwitch as the main proponent of crime in the novel with some reference to the crimes of Compeyson. One answer succeeded in comparing the two and the relative gravity of their crimes with some apt and focused exploration of the nature of Victorian prisons as a relevant context discussion.

20. There were also very few answers to this question. Those seen were able to articulate Pip's character development throughout the novel with a sense of the novel's structure as an important AO2 consideration. There was creditable use of the context point that Dickens wrote his novel to be serialised and how this affected Pip's portrayal.

The Scarlet Letter

21. No responses were seen to this question.

22. Very few responses were seen to this question. In terms of suffering, Arthur Dimmesdale, Pearl and Hester proved the focus of answers with one response taking an alternative approach and making reference to the suffering of Roger Chillingworth on discovering his wife's adultery. Context discussion inevitably focused on the Puritan valued of the community in which the characters are set.