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## Examiners' Report June 2010

### GCE English Literature 6ET01

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## 6ET01: Explorations in Prose and Poetry

### Introduction

Timing did not seem to present a very significant problem for the majority, though there were those who found the demand of managing to complete all three tasks in the available period difficult.

All of the tasks set drew responses.

The quality of written expression and organisation was generally satisfactory or better.

The exam is divided into three sections, as already stated. What follows is a commentary on levels of performance in each of these components. There is also exemplification of student responses to some of the tasks. Many of the remarks on specific questions come from the reports of members of the examining team.

## Section A - Unseen Poetry & Prose

This part of the exam offers candidates a choice of response. Two unseen texts are set - one poem and one prose extract, followed by three short answer tasks. Candidates choose one or the other passage to answer on. The question is worth 20 marks and assesses AO1 (10 marks overall) and AO2 (10 marks overall).


### Poetry

The poem set was *Being Boring* by Wendy Cope. It certainly provided candidates with plenty to write about. Often they wrote far more than necessary.

### Question 1(a)

Simply identifying the rhyme scheme was not enough to gain above 1 mark. Generally, some kind of further discussion about specific words, for example mooring and boring and the impact of these was required. Many candidates made good assertions about the way in which the rhyme reflected monotony, satisfaction, regularity or comfort; others were able to associate the pattern with pace and drew conclusions relating to the measured approach achieved by both. There was quite a lot of often irrelevant digression into commentary on punctuation.

In 'Being Boring', Cope has there is an a regular ABAB rhyme scheme, which perhaps ref 'ray' and 'today'. As a result, it perhaps reflects the regularity in the voice's life, and thus emphasises the regular, and 'boring', routine. As the rhyme is ongoing and quite rigid. Also, the rhyme injects the poem with a certain pace, which is quite slow and relaxing; it gives the poem no sense of energy or activity, thus as a result highlighting the lack of energy in the voice's life - as readers, we read the poem with no excitement, emphasising this even more.



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Examiner Comments

This answer was awarded 5/5.

### Question 1(b)

The question on imagery was successfully managed, on the whole. Candidates were able to comment on Cope's use of simile, metaphor and personification, for example, in an informed and intelligent manner, many choosing to discuss the images of the cabbage and the garden as central to the poem's meaning and effect.

### Question 1(c)

This task proved to be a differentiator here. Many candidates were able to pick out the colloquial or conversational aspects, but were less successful in getting to grips with what the tone actually was - a significant proportion labelling it as, for example "depressed", which they then struggled to substantiate. As ever, many simply repeated what they had said in either Q1a or Q1b and consequently achieved marks in the lower band. It is suggested that if students wish to return to a discussion of techniques which they have already covered in previous tasks when answering the third part of this section, they ensure that they pick on different examples.

The overall tone in this poem is of happy acceptance. There is a regular iambic rhythm throughout which makes the tone upbeat and cheerful and gives the impression of a speaking voice. The fact that this rhythm runs through the whole poem also shows that nothing changes in Cope's life and she is happy with this. At the end of stanza one there is an almost apologetic tone with the line "I know this is all very boring." This gives the sense that Cope is talking to the reader and acknowledging it is not interesting to hear about her life. The fact that it is the last line of the stanza draws attention to it, but the end-stopped line seems to show that she is <sup>determined to</sup> ~~accepting the fact that she is boring and will not consider changing it.~~ The use of monosyllabic words in this poem gives forward movement to the rhythm, adding to the happy tone, for example "I get on with my work" and "what are they for". This also adds to the idea that Cope's life is boring as the language she uses is very simple and not very ~~an~~ exciting. In conclusion, Cope's use of poetic techniques show that she is happy and determined to keep her life boring resulting in a happy, almost rebellious tone.



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Examiner Comments

This clear and sensible response to the task, with its good grasp of the relevant techniques and their effects was awarded 5 + 5.

## **Prose**

The prose extract was written by Patrick Payne Brennan.

The first task targets AO1 (5 marks), the second AO2 (5 marks) and the third AO1 and AO2 together (10 marks in total).

### **Question 2(a)**

Candidates answering this question offered a wide variety of response, ranging from the very general (often getting no further than a summary of the events in chronological order) to the purposeful and particular. More successful responses dealt with the use of adverbs, tense and syntax, for example.

### **Question 2(b)**

Answers here were also varied, but to a lesser extent. Those candidates attaining marks in the higher band tended to choose examples such as “Rise!” and the language used to describe the hypnotist’s eyes.

### Question 2(c)

This answer, which gained full marks, exemplifies the sort of comment which some candidates were able to make in regard to the question on creation of mystery.

The fact both characters in this extract of Brennan's work are nameless immediately creates a sense of mystery. The 'young man' and the 'Hypnotist' seem to have a lack of identity thus making it difficult for the reader to connect with the characters, creating a mysterious atmosphere.

Furthermore, Brennan uses the adjectives ('wild' and 'luminous-looking') to describe the eyes of the Hypnotist which seems very unnatural for a human. This again enforces the sense of mystery as the humanity of the Hypnotist is in doubt, and the reader doesn't know who or what he is.

In addition, another way Brennan creates mystery is the fact the man 'continued to rise' despite the fact the Hypnotist appears to be dead. The fact that the 'barker' panics and attempts to catch the young man implies that the trick is in fact magical as he is the master of ceremonies and would know that it was a simple trick, however the man 'continued to float upwards' leaving the reader with a sense of mystery as the trick is unexplainable.

(Total for Question 2 = 20 marks)

## General Comments

Candidates are advised to bear in mind at least some of the following injunctions: be specific wherever possible; be concise; use two examples if you can, even where you are not explicitly told to do so; don't overlook the obvious. Four sentences could and should be able to do the work for the a) & b) tasks.

All of this stated, the level of response to the unseen was good this session - more candidates wrote with much greater conviction and accuracy.

## Section B - Poetry

This part of the exam offers candidates a choice of response. A selection of poems from three anthologies (*From Here to Eternity*, Oxford University Press and *The Rattle Bag*) are set, grouped under the headings *Home*, *Land* and *Work*. The first option is a generic essay, allowing students to choose which poems they use to address the terms of the task. The second choice specifies one poem from each anthology and invites candidates to choose at least one other with which to respond.

All of the tasks set drew responses, though Q3a & Q5a were the most popular questions.

Section B targets AO1 (15 marks), AO2 (5 marks) and AO3 (20 marks).

### Question 3(a)

This was by far the most popular of the Section B tasks. As was true of all the other responses to Poetry, students who adopted a more genuinely comparative approach to the task did much better than those who chose a linear method (dealing with one poem, then another). Some candidates disagreed with the quotation and then went on to explore imagery and symbolism in one text, referring to a second poem to demonstrate other features used by poets to generate reader engagement. On the whole, candidates conveyed interest and involvement.

### Question 3(b)

Firm understanding of the poets' purposes and effects was often shown. Addressing the named poems, candidates analysed the way the poets embodied emotional complexities in the structural relationship between home and nature - MacNeice's sense of entrapment in the inside/outside motif, and Lawrence's love of nature coming up against his ambivalent feelings for his mother, for example. Candidates frequently supported their argument with detailed and appreciative reference. Responses to 'The Wanderer' were sometimes rather limited by seeing the poem simplistically as an extended metaphor for homosexuality.

### Question 4(a)

This question elicited a variety of interesting responses ranging across the selected texts. Weaker answers tended to focus on outlining the "something to be learned", while others adopted a more exploratory approach, with effective comparison and contrast supported by detailed reference.



**Question 4(b)**

Candidates who used Thomas (in either version) tended to focus on the 'elm' being juxtaposed with the ideas of war. Some candidates got very confused about the idea of it as a 'war poem' or a poem about work. Candidates also focused a lot on the 'lovers' in the wood - some successfully linking it to motifs of fertility and procreation. Others were a little more prurient.

**Question 5(a)**

Larkin's *Toads* appeared as one of the chosen texts in a high proportion of responses. Small clusters of answers were very similar in terms of content (same two poems, same key points made in the same order) which might have reflected over-preparation of sample answers in some centres. Even in these instances, however, candidates were able to differentiate themselves by their quality of argument and analytical focus on poets' presentation/method.

**Question 5(b)**

Here, not all candidates distinguished fully between personal elegy and the passing of a 'way of life', but still very many treatments were sensitive and appreciative. Hopkins was the most popular of the named poems. Candidates examined his dense verbal texture, and some extended their argument effectively into the role of the priest as well as the farrier. 'The Forge' was a popular companion piece here, well integrated with the question, though very few addressed the possibility that Heaney is offering *The Blacksmith* as an extended metaphor for *The Poet*.

## General Comments

In one or two cases, candidates answered on poems which are not named. This represents a rubric infringement, unfortunately, and centres are asked to ensure that the specification is followed with due care.

Similarly, those responses which do not deal with two poems, for example, are unlikely to move beyond the middle attainment bands.

On the whole, however, as with Section A, candidates seemed to have acquired the basics of literary analysis and were able to organise and express their ideas with clarity and common sense. Their use of supporting evidence was at least competent and they tried, mainly, to compare or contrast the poems which they had chosen in responding to the proposition.

As a rule, it is suggested that candidates try and focus in detail on two poems in their answer. The three text model (which has been recommended in previous Reports) where a third item is used to counter the proposition in the rubric, only really works where candidates have something definitive to say about all three poems. Too often here, there was a “bolt on” feel to the final section of the essay, which often began with “A poem which disagrees with this statement” or a like formula. Nonetheless, there were those who moved beyond a commentary on two poems with purpose and even verve, displaying a real understanding of how verse works in the round.

## Section C - Prose

This part of the exam also offers candidates a choice of response. Five groups of three texts are presented: *Jane Eyre* and either *Wide Sargasso Sea* or *The Magic Toyshop*; *Brighton Rock* and either *Lies of Silence* or *A Clockwork Orange*; *Pride and Prejudice* and either *French Lieutenant's Woman* or *The Yellow Wallpaper*; *Wuthering Heights* and either *The Scarlet Letter* or *The Color Purple* and *Howards End* and either *The Remains of the Day* or *The Shooting Party*. The first option for each group is a generic essay. The second choice specifies an extract from the core text - the prompt suggests focus on that passage to start with, but candidates are intended to move onwards into a wider exploration of the core text and the one chosen to extend the argument.

Section C targets AO1 (15 marks) and AO2 (25 marks).

### Question 6(a)

This was the most popular of the Section C tasks. Knowledge of *Jane Eyre* was good in many answers and there were some spirited discussions of *Jane Eyre*'s childhood sufferings - not always sympathetically handled. Most candidates concentrated on the opening chapters or Helen Burns' death at Lowood. There was considerable sympathy for *Jane*'s experiences at the dreadful Brocklehurst's hands. One candidate neatly suggested that the character's actions, most notably the hair incidents, were a result of suppressed sexual desires. One candidate thought Helen Burns was impossibly, and ludicrously, good. Cynicism was a minority standpoint though. '*Wide Sargasso Sea*' was the preferred accompaniment with a smattering of '*The Magic Toyshop*'. On occasions, '*Wide Sargasso Sea*' was preferred over the main text and dealt with in great detail.

### **Question 6(b)**

This task drew relatively few responses. Candidates who followed the instruction and used the extract to focus their response often produced a detailed close reading of the section, in many cases to good effect. The best responses were ones which looked at the punctuation or specific word choices used to show irony; weaker answers tended just to link it to the eventual outcome of the novel and simply listed points of irony. Most candidates seemed fully to understand ‘irony’ which was a welcome development on previous papers; only a few synonymised it with sarcasm. Here too, ‘Wide Sargasso Sea’ was the preferred supporting text in the majority of cases.

### **Question 7(a)**

In general, candidates seemed to enjoy answering this question. Some adopted a fairly simple approach, outlining the detective element in Brighton Rock and suspense in the second text. More sophisticated responses analysed the writers’ exploration of different kinds of truth, ranging confidently across both texts to provide supporting detail. The task seems simple, but it is in fact potentially complex in ways that were not always recognised by the candidates. Ida was obviously the central focus, but was often seen as a heroic truth-and-justice seeker, a reading which is not always borne out by Greene’s text, beyond comparing her with an apathetic police force. Some candidates constructed quite interesting arguments by equating truth with religious revelation.

### **Question 7(b)**

There were comparatively few takers for this question. The characters were, commendably, seen as authorial constructs, and many candidates displayed a justified ambivalence of response, having mixed feelings about the stout-swilling Ida, or sympathetically tracing Pinkie’s dysfunction back to Paradise place. ‘Lies of Silence’ was less popular as an accompanying text than ‘A Clockwork Orange’. Discussions of the latter often focussed on individual liberty and choice. Interestingly, Alex was often viewed with sympathy as a ‘helpless character’.

**Question 8(a)**

By way of commentary for this task, a strong response is reproduced with a breakdown of its Assessment Objective analysis.

Question 8a

The statement 'Pride and Prejudice is essentially about characters seeing and understanding their own worlds' is one that I don't believe to be true of all characters. However, in the society in which Jane Austen lived in and wrote about, it was almost a necessity to be involved in your own life to have a comfortable life and this is reflected a great deal in *Pride and Prejudice*. This necessity of society is also true of 'The Yellow Wallpaper' where Gilman created a world for the protagonist to escape to as the thought of always conforming to a world expected of her by society became too much.

Firstly, the characters of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy are two ~~characters~~ who ~~do not~~ ~~just~~ ~~not~~ ~~the~~ ~~one~~ ~~is~~ remains completely within their own worlds throughout the novel. This is because, in order for both to make drastic changes in their ~~characters~~ parts of view, both characters must see into each other's lives to see how Elizabeth's prejudice and Darcy's pride have hindered them from being together. For example, when Lydia runs away with

Mr Wickham, Elizabeth believes it to be her uncle who has payed Wickham's commission and saved the family from shame. However, it is only after Elizabeth realises that Darcy is the one who helped her she can see how 'blind' she has been and this event is what changes her view of her world and allows her to be with Darcy. A quote that shows how Elizabeth's view is forced to change is "Mr Darcy!" repeated Elizabeth in utter amazement" where Jane Austen has used this shock as a ~~turning~~ turning point of the book where the reader realises Darcy's kindness at the same time as Elizabeth. Similarly, when Darcy first proposes to Elizabeth, her refusal is the shocking insight into Elizabeth's world that makes him realise he must change his proud ways where he admits to loving Elizabeth 'against his better judgement'. However, within the Yellow Wallpaper, the narrator changes in an opposite way in the way in which she becomes more and more isolated in her own world as the book progresses to a point where it becomes difficult even for a reader to comprehend her thoughts. This is a technique used by Gilman to show how a patriarchal society can isolate a woman to the

part of insanity, where the feeling of being trapped becomes physical, here shown in the back as the women behind the wallpaper.

A quote which shows the mental ~~is~~ breaking away from the bonds of society is "I've got out at last" where a reader can see that the narrator's imagined world and the real world have merged as it is the only way she feels she can be free.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, there are indeed many characters who do essentially resolve around seeing and understanding their own worlds. The clearest example of this is Charlotte Lucas who sees her situation, is one that she must resolve by any means to provide a secure home and life for herself. To do this, Charlotte marries Mr Collins who, although she does not love him, can provide security. ~~It is~~ This is clear when Charlotte said 'I'm not a romantic you know' which is a clear, certain statement, that Jane Austen used to reflect Charlotte's need to be ~~self interested~~ totally selfish in terms of marriage. One critic who upholds this view is Mukherjee who said "marriage is an economic need" which is applicable to

Charlotte here. However, Mr Collins is equally 'in his own world' so much so that he dismisses Elizabeth's refusal of marriage a 'formality' as he cannot accept that she would refuse any offer of security in that society. This is also true of his ~~not~~ constant referency to Lady Catherine De Bourgh is an attempt to make himself seem highly connected. Jane Austen often uses free indirect speech when describing Mr Collins as 'his ~~own~~ language' is so pretentious and self-involved that he almost becomes a caricature of himself for example 'he set about it in an orderly manner' when describing his proposal to Elizabeth.

The Yellow Wallpaper is written entirely in the first person and therefore is easily interpreted as being totally in the world of the protagonist, however the descriptions of John's world such as him 'staying out all night' are a detail which reveal to a reader why the protagonist is so trapped and is so important to the overall tone as the first person narrative description of the nursery.

Finally, another way in which Jane Austen reveals to a reader that many characters ~~have~~ are essentially being and understanding

their own world is through her careful use of description. Jane Austen very rarely uses description of character's appearance but is careful to give a detailed financial description to almost every character making the subject of money in society of great importance. For example, 'Mr Bingley inherited property to the extent of nearly or tenched thousand pounds' is given but no real description of any other kind. This information is often revealed through dialogue to show just how important money became to people when they focused on their own gain and one character who is typical of this is Mrs Bennet who often refers to men in contexts of how much they earn but in an attempt to marry off her daughters to have financial security for ~~themselves~~ herself.

In conclusion, I believe the statement is entirely true of many characters in Pride and Prejudice but for the characters which need to develop, it is necessary for them to expand their views to see other people's lives. The opposite is true of 'yellow wallpaper' as the narrator is forced to understand only her world as other people ~~to~~ are shown to only control it in order to help themselves.



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Examiner Comments

AO1: Sustained argument, clearly developed in the most part. Informed and relevant, mainly. A sound use of terms. Accurate and fluent expression. Engaged with both texts, to a point.

14/15

AO2: Explores writers' use and selection of features of structure, form and language - comments on dialogue towards the end raise the quality of response, in fact. Some critical understanding. Good idea of how meaning is created and what it actually is here. Sustains linkage between texts, just about, and manages to keep focus on question intact.

21/25

**Total: 35/40.**

### **Question 8(b)**

Though a less popular question, this task drew some strong responses, which were both capable and focused. The influence of chance, accident and co-incidence in the events of the novel was recognised, most obviously the meetings between Elizabeth and Darcy, where Fate was seen as an authorial tool in the development of character and relationship. A number of candidates went through *Pride and Prejudice* picking out examples of 'inevitability' - some explicitly commented on the genre as a guide, but most implicitly recognised that as 'a silly novel' it was going to end up with marriage. The really good candidates picked out specific words in earlier sections and married them to their logical resolution. Fate was viewed through a feminist stance in many responses to 'The Yellow Wallpaper' - this was generally good. The more able candidates when doing this looked at the ways in which the narrator is metaphorically silenced by her husband and the medical profession.

### **Question 9(a)**

This proved a very inviting question - the book is wallpapered with passions both positive and negative. Most candidates considered Catherine and Heathcliff, of course, but there were also interesting discussions of Heathcliff's capacity for hatred and passion for revenge; of their passionate love of the natural world; and in general of the sheer intensity of all the human emotions on display. Even Joseph's religious fervour was examined thoughtfully as a source of black comedy for Bronte, and the reading of Edgar as dispassionate and effete was challenged with some success. The question specifies 'methods', and candidates provided focused discussions of Bronte's use of dialogue, imagery, motifs and violent and infernal action. 'The Color Purple' was most often used to extend the argument and here too, there was a wealth of detail for candidates to mine.

### **Question 9(b)**

This was a popular and often successfully handled task. Candidates tended to analyse the prescribed passage in some detail, often pointing out the foundation of a Gothic atmosphere. The structural contrast between the Heights and the Grange was widely understood; the atmosphere and importance of the moors was elucidated with some telling detail; and the final paragraphs of the book, with all passion spent, were appreciatively analysed. ‘The Colour Purple’ was the usual secondary text, though comments were often quite generalised and looked rather thin alongside the detailed treatments of Bronte.

### **Question 10(a)**

There were few answers to Q10, and they tended to be strong. Some weaker answers seemed to confuse social duty with social class - and whilst this was not necessarily fatal, it tended to a more sociological focus rather than a concentration on the actions/motivations of characters. There were some very well-detailed, well-informed explorations. Wilcox’s instruction to “lower your voice in front of the shopkeeper” was contrasted in one essay with Helen’s “He’s worth helping” to exemplify detachment versus a sense of duty towards the “lower orders”.

### **Question 10(b)**

The fairly small number of candidates attempting this task appeared to relish analysing the symbolic details of Leonard’s sitting-room, but were also able to demonstrate understanding of the novel as a whole and make informed reference to the second text.

## **General Comment**

This sitting of 6ET01 differentiated very effectively between candidates. This said, there was a stronger level of response to many questions than had been seen in previous versions of the paper - candidates and their teachers are to be commended for their work.

## Grade Boundaries

| Grade                 | Max. Mark | A  | B  | C  | D  | E  | N  | U |
|-----------------------|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|
| Raw boundary mark     | 100       | 76 | 66 | 57 | 48 | 39 | 30 | 0 |
| Uniform boundary mark | 120       | 96 | 84 | 72 | 60 | 48 | 36 | 0 |

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