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Edexcel

Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel GCE

English Literature (9ET0)

Paper 3: Poetry

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Introduction

The tiny entry this series (22 candidates actually submitting scripts for Paper 3) make comparison with previous years difficult. As this series was provided as an opportunity for candidates to improve on their centre-assessed grades in the summer, that will also have affected the nature of the cohort. The October 2020 series was a similar 'resit' opportunity, the much larger entry meant a wider spread of achievement last year. Much work this time was of a low or moderate standard, with some students not attempting the full paper.

Students' work did not indicate significant problems with the challenge of the paper. Candidates were able to respond to the unseen poem in Section A, and did not appear to find the topics set there or in Section B more difficult than in previous series. The level of achievement was however relatively low, with answers often much shorter and less thorough than usual. This could be a result of missed learning over the two years of the course, compounded by the lapse of time since candidates were in school or college.

Section A

Questions 1 and 2, involving comparison of the unseen poem *Map* by Helen Tookey with one of the Forward Anthology set poems, proved similar in difficulty to previous series. An ability to hear and comment on the tone in Tookey's poem helped to lift work into Level 3, with comments such as 'Tookey describes the silhouette of the traveller:

her black hair and boxy coat
marking the boundaries, the solid shape
of her against not-her"

'Here Tookey creates a sense of otherness....' Another candidate claimed, rather improbably, that 'the use of an end stopped line suggests that the speaker is fascinated by the woman and the journey she has taken,' though the idea of the poet's fascination with the subject would have been worth exploring. A few candidates took their analysis further, such as this comment on the end of *Map*, which allowed for more effective comparison with Flynn's *The Furthest Distances I've Travelled*:

In this, personal reflection is explored as lonely and bittersweet, a way to gauge the unpleasant realities around you, or, as the girl, remain dismissive, forever living as though running from your very self, and the pain of realisation.

Better responses explored aspects such as point of view in the poems. One wondered whether 'the narrator and the woman [in *Map*] are the same individual' and whether this 'is symbolic of her personal reflections on her identity as unsure and lacking clarity'. Another compared the ways the two poems end to make a thoughtful comment on 'the real treasures' Flynn has gained from "holidaying briefly in their lives", concluding: 'The verb "survives" ends the poem on a triumphant note.'

In many cases, however, there was little detailed analysis of the poems, especially of the unseen, and grasp of the Anthology poems was sometimes uncertain. A number of students, for example, assumed that Flynn had travelled to the exotic places named in her poem, missing the significance of her title. Comments on style and structure were often vague and unconvincing: 'There is no rhyme scheme in *Map*, which could imply that the woman's journey requires no romanticisation, it is a journey that is beautiful in itself.'

Section B

Although there was acceptable work on these texts, in many cases responses were weaker, and shorter, than on Section A. Only a minority of texts were covered, with no more than three answers to any question. Few attained to any sense of overview of the poetry and context.

A response to Question 21, on T S Eliot, did demonstrate more critical evaluation and contextual awareness, concluding:

Both *Burial of the Dead* and *The Hollow Men* are bound by complexity, numb with the cruel notions of men's obliviousness and undermined by the pessimism brought by modernity.

Mostly, however, context tended to be treated superficially at best, with assertions such as 'Rossetti's readers had taken her seriously solely due to the fact that she had an affiliation the the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood... considered reputable due to her membership in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and for this reason only.'

Teachers are referred to reports on earlier series for detailed comments and advice on approaching both section of this paper.

