



# **Examiners' Report**

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel IAL

In English Literature (WET0 01)

Unit 1: Post-2000 Poetry and Prose

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## Introduction

Centres are thanked for choosing Pearson Edexcel for their International A-Level English Literature provider.

For this unit, WET01, the open book examination is 2 hours long and there are two sections.

All candidates must answer one question from a choice of two in Section A, Post-2000 Poetry. Candidates then respond to a question on their selected text from Section B, Post-2000 Prose.

For Section A, Post-2000 Poetry, students will use the reading skills they have developed through the course. Students will answer one essay question from a choice of two comparing a named poem from the prescribed list of poems from *Poems of the Decade: An Anthology of the Forward Books of Poetry* with another poem of their own choice from the prescribed list.

For Section B, Post-2000 Prose, students answer one essay question from a choice of two on the prose text they have studied. Students can select from the following titles: *The Kite Runner*, *The Life of Pi*, *The White Tiger*, *Brooklyn* or *Purple Hibiscus*. Students should study their chosen text in detail. Student responses will be informed by an appreciation of the contexts in which texts are written and read.

In studying for Post-2000 Poetry and Prose, students 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 25 marks available for Section A and 25 for Section B. The total mark of 50 represents 50% of the total IAS and 25% of the total IA2.

Section A, Post-2000 Poetry, assesses Assessment Objectives AO1, AO2 and AO4.

Section B, Post-2000 Prose, assesses Assessment Objectives AO1, AO2 and AO3.

AO5 is *not* assessed in this paper.

## General Overview of the WET01 Summer 2019 (1906) paper and performance

This has been a successful paper. There were no errors, no erratum notices and no changes made to the mark scheme.

The number of entries has continued to increase and we are hopeful this will continue to be the trend. As centres have become more experienced with the demands of the specification, the quality of candidates' responses has continued to improve as candidates are dealing with the range of Assessment Objectives.

For this series we saw students offering responses on all of the texts, and the full range of marks was awarded.

For Section A, Post-2000 Poetry, some responses were a little disappointing as students did not analyse in sufficient depth and detail the connections between the nominated poem and the poem of their own choice. It is important to note that AO4 is assessed in this section of the examination. Some candidates explored the possible metaphorical interpretations of the poems and the methods the poets had employed, but had not looked to establish an initial overview of what the poems might mean. Candidates would benefit from offering an exploration of the potential overall meanings of the poems they are writing about before moving on and delving deeper for metaphorical meanings and offering interpretations of the connections between the poems.

In Section B, the most popular prose text studied section was *The Kite Runner* (Questions 3 and 4) and the second most popular *The White Tiger* (Questions 7 and 8). Many responses gained marks in the top two levels although, at times, candidates did not sufficiently cover all assessment objectives thus preventing candidates receiving marks at the top of a particular level. There were some candidates who did not consider context and others who did not consider the variety of ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts (such as, but not limited to, writers' use of the language, structure and form of the texts).

There is still some evidence of responses that are not as well developed or as fluent as would be expected at this level. Some responses were very brief and tended to be narrative in nature rather than exploring the meanings of the texts. The specification states that candidates are required to communicate fluently, accurately and effectively their knowledge, understanding and critical evaluation of texts.

For the Post-2000 Prose section, many candidates were well prepared and met the demands of the questions they answered across the Assessment Objectives. Some fell short on drawing out meaning, making short, surface comments on quotations rather than exploring more thoroughly the ways in which language is used to forge meaning. There were also many responses that lacked the expected knowledge of

the terminology, concepts and approaches to qualify for marks in the higher levels. There were also some excellent, crafted responses that were a joy to read. A number of candidates were awarded full marks for their Section B essays.

Marks are always applied positively, but 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.

## **Detailed Commentary on individual questions**

### **Section A: Post-2000 Poetry**

#### **Question 1**

The nominated poem for Question 1 was 'Chainsaw Versus the Pampas Grass' by Simon Armitage. The poem was compared to a wide variety of other poems from the anthology, the most popular being 'Eat Me', 'Giuseppe' and 'The Gun'. These lent themselves well to a discussion of the 'strong over the weak' and the combination of 'Chainsaw' and 'Eat Me' was particularly apposite in discussing the endings. Many other poems such as 'Map Woman', 'Please Hold' and 'A Minor Role' were offered but comparisons were not always successful and seemed a bit forced.

This was a successful question, as it proved to be a good discriminator with a wide range of marks awarded. The most successful responses to the question were those where candidates had approached the task with comparison in mind and which drew on a variety of ways in which the poets create meaning. Some students were able to write with sophistication and control, identifying a variety of ways in which the poems dealt with power and offering probing and enlightening analysis of literary and linguistic techniques. Weaker responses tended to adopt very simplistic stereotypes of masculinity and femininity (male = dominance, 'laddishness', etc.; female = weakness, subservience, etc.). Stronger responses, however, explored ideas of power in more nuanced ways and identified the ways in which power is distributed and worked out.

#### **Question 2**

The nominated poem for Question 2 was 'The Lammas Hireling' by Ian Duhig. Some candidates had been fully prepared to write on this poem and their answers were clearly underpinned by an understanding of Irish folklore and the meaning of Lammas. In some cases contextual knowledge tended to take over but for the most part it helped candidates to tackle and explore 'the mysterious' and the central ambiguities of the poem. Popular comparisons were 'The Gun' and 'The Fox in the National Museum of Wales', whilst the most popular choice was clearly 'Giuseppe'.

This was also a successful question, and candidates received marks covering all levels; it proved to be a good discriminator of candidates' abilities. As with Question 1, the most successful responses to the question were those where candidates had approached the task with comparison in mind and which drew on a variety of ways in which the poets create meaning. Some students wrote effectively about the ways in which Duhig and their selected poet presented mysterious events. Such candidates were able to write with sophistication and control, identifying a variety of ways in which mystery is conveyed and explored in the poems and offering effective analysis of both literary techniques and the poets' use of language.

### **General Observations on Section A**

1. It is recommended that candidates show they understand the poems they are writing about as a whole before proceeding to detailed analysis. It is also important for them to establish clearly how the poems they are writing about connect to the primary focus of the question (i.e. power or mysterious events). The best candidates established a clear sense of how the poems related to the themes of their chosen question and then proceeded to explore the poets' literary approaches and techniques to draw out how meanings are created.
2. In the Post-2000 Poetry section, candidates are required to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the function of genre features and conventions in poetry. They also need to show knowledge and understanding of a range of ways to read texts, including critical reading for detail of how writers use and adapt language, form and structure in texts.
3. It is recommended that centres continue to make use of the Sample Assessment Materials. Looking carefully at past papers and mark schemes for this paper will help them to become even more familiar with the assessment requirements. The mark grids demonstrate how candidates can progress from one level to the next. For Level 4 and above, responses need to be discriminating, critical and evaluative. Close analysis should be controlled and candidates should be able to identify and provide examples of the nuances and subtleties of the writer's craft.

The Post-2000 Poetry questions assess Assessment Objectives (AOs) 1, 2 and 4:

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.

AO4: Explore connections across literary texts

**Context is not assessed in Section A of the paper.**

**Section B: Post-2000 Prose**

***The Kite Runner* (Khaled Hosseini)**

**Question 3**

This question was the more popular of the two. The rubric was clearly understood by candidates who could all provide an answer at various levels. At a basic level, candidates tended to produce character studies, focusing on Amir's and Baba's betrayals of various characters – in particular Amir's failure to stand by Hassan during and after the rape scene. Other candidates searched a wider range of 'betrayals' in the novel, such as Baba's betrayal of his sons, Amir's betrayal of Sohrab and Soraya's breaking of Islamic moral values. Higher ranking candidates were able to focus on the ways in which Afghanistan itself, with its developing political and religious conflicts, is 'betrayed' in a variety of ways. More able candidates considered the ways in which Hosseini writes about the problems of Afghanistan in an allegorical way. This illustrated deeper appreciation of the writer's potential intent and showed that these candidates understood that the novel is a literary construct. The question required candidates to explore 'acts of betrayal'. Quite a few candidates understandably moved beyond betrayal to consider the associated idea of redemption in the novel. Better candidates managed to balance these two concepts effectively. However, other candidates lost their focus on betrayal and produced answers focussing mostly (sometimes solely) on redemption. For the most part, contextual knowledge was strong and underpinned the answers.

**Question 4**

The question invited candidates to take issue with the proposition, and there were good instances of candidates considering the extent to which this was true of the novel and whether the events and situations Hosseini presents are, in fact, susceptible to such a 'black and white' analysis. It was also pleasing to see better candidates providing sophistication by considering Hosseini's style and focusing more on the structure of the text as well as the unreliable narration of Amir. Again, as in Q3, however, there were candidates who resorted to a less effective character driven study. Such character-driven studies tended to show little awareness of AOs, but sometimes strength was added by exploring the idea that the novel is a *bildungsroman*. Candidates were, in general, able to make use of a range of appropriate contextual material to support their responses.

## ***The Life of Pi***

### **Questions 5**

Some candidates took the question at face value and described Pi's journey to Canada. Many also went on, however, to present a more philosophical discussion and had obviously considered Martell's own thoughts in depth. Sometimes philosophical content was presented at the expense of consideration of AO2 – the ways in which Martell shapes meaning in the novel – and relevant embedded evidence from the text was not always included. Context proved to be problematic, and many candidates had not taken enough time to consider the kinds of contextual material they might include and how it could contribute to their responses. Candidates might, for example, have included references to Pondicherry and Indian political problems in order to provide appropriate contexts for reading the text.

### **Question 6**

This question lent itself to developed philosophical discussion. There were many candidates who examined the text and tried to find different ways in which Martell explores the idea of confinement. There were some interesting comments on whether animals confined in the zoo were confined or free, having never known any other environment. However, arguments were not always linked to particular examples or to relevant evidence from the novel. Candidates often became involved in detailed philosophical debate about the proposition, but it is important that they maintain awareness of the AOs. It is important to explore how meanings are shaped in the novel (AO2), and what contextual ideas can be drawn upon to support and develop readings of the text (AO3).

## ***The White Tiger (Aravind Adiga)***

### **Question 7**

On the whole, there were some very strong, competent answers in response to this question. Some candidates focused on Balram as an unreliable narrator and his own personal 'morality'. Candidates also, however, considered a variety of other characters who also display immoral behaviours and attitudes. Candidates generally focused effectively on contextual issues embedded in the novel, such as the caste system and inherent political and social problems in India. There were many who argued that morality was a luxury often dispensed with in characters' (especially Balram's) struggles to escape their situations in the 'Rooster coop' and to reach for the top. A popular term used by candidates was *ubermensch* to describe Balram's apparent invincibility, but it would have been interesting to see the philosophical implications of this term and its application to ideas of morality more closely considered.



## **Question 8**

Candidates answering this question offered a good variety of contextual material to underpin reading and analysis. By and large, candidates revealed a very sound knowledge of the text and offered relevant illustrations from it to root their responses in Adiga's novel. Many chose to explore the Rooster Coop, darkness and light and the caste system. Some focused on Adiga's relentlessly pessimistic view of Indian society and how little has changed. It was good to see that a few candidates were aware of the role of dark comedy and the effects Adiga achieves by its use throughout the novel. Some candidates provided a straightforward focus on Balram's home life, but others were able to contrast Balram's situation with that of Mr Ashok and used this as a basis for interesting contrasts. There was little comment on Adiga's style of writing and the construction of the novel.

## ***Brooklyn* (Colm Toibin)**

### **Question 9.**

There was general understanding of the question and most candidates displayed appropriate contextual knowledge of Irish economic problems in the 1950s. Reference was often made to the American dream, although this was often simply dropped in as a term without any significant attempt to explore what it might actually mean and how ideas associated with it might apply to the events of the novel and the lives of the characters portrayed. Many candidates argued that going to America was a positive experience and fully supported the lead statement. Comments were made on Eilis' new-found confidence and her experience of life outside parochial Ireland particularly the ways she develops through meeting people of different nationalities. Some candidates tended to resort to a narrative approach rather than engaging in more targeted and developed discussion about the experiences (both positive and negative) that Eilis gains.

### **Question 10**

Candidates again displayed good contextual knowledge, drawing on a variety of relevant background knowledge to support reading, noting – especially – Ireland's economic difficulties in the 1950s as a context for migration. References were made to the homesickness faced by many emigrants and these were particularly linked to Eilis' crossing on the liner. Other comments focused on how Eilis settled down in America and how she managed to find a job and develop her education. On the whole, most answers tended to look at the positive story of human migration rather than the pitfalls such as the loneliness felt by Eilis and the plight of the stranded Irishmen who were lost in America but could not return to Ireland.

## ***Purple Hibiscus* (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie)**

### **Question 11**

One examiner observed uncertainty as to whether all candidates had understood the meaning of 'resilience' as a number of responses seemed to focus instead on ideas of 'resistance'. Candidates are advised to be sure they understand the terms of any question they choose to answer. Some responses adopted a largely narrative approach. Such responses were marked by the absence (on the whole) of detailed consideration of how meanings are shaped in literary texts (AO2) and contexts (AO3). There were some candidates who noted the irony that Papa – who showed such resilience in fighting the political regime in his stand for free speech – has in turn become such a repressive force. Resilience was a concept effectively applied, by some candidates, as a way of exploring this irony. Many displayed a good knowledge of political events in Nigeria, using these events as suitable context. Candidates displayed strong textual knowledge but did not always focus on Adichie's use of language and structure. However, some candidates noted the symbolism in the novel in particular the inclusion of the purple hibiscus.

### **Question 12**

This question required a recognition of Kambili's experiences and the ways in which these may be understood in relation to the wider world. A number of candidates commented upon the idea of political corruption and the ways in which it affects people's lives. This was often effectively illustrated using Adichie's presentation of the plight of Auntie Ifeoma, Kambili's experiences of growing up in her dysfunctional family and her ensuing growth in awareness. Most commented on the fact that *Purple Hibiscus* is a form of *bildungsroman*. Again, some candidates tended to offer a narrative approach, but stronger responses demonstrated pleasing abilities to explore nuances of the question and the novel in more targeted and thoughtful ways.

### **General Observations on Section B**

1. Marks at all levels were awarded for all questions. Responses ranged from very brief answers providing surface readings of texts or a narrative overview through to very impressive critical and evaluative essays which were a delight to read. On the whole, centres are to be congratulated for preparing their students so thoroughly for the examination.
2. A number of candidates in the top levels were able to refer to a range of contextual factors and the impact these had on their readings of the texts.

Some candidates, however, did not explore all AOs (especially AO3). There was a range of ability displayed in exploring the ways in which meanings are shaped in prose texts, but candidates performing in the lower levels demonstrated more limited ability to explore the craft of the texts they had studied in relation to form (what is a novel, and how does it work?) and writers' use of language across full texts. It is important in discussing writers' use of language that candidates demonstrate how specific examples they choose for analysis relate more broadly to what is happening in the texts they have studied – i.e. that they demonstrate that these are not isolated examples.

3. It is important for centres to remember that the bullet points in the mark grid reflect the requirements of the AOs and how effectively these are met at each level. Markers award marks according to a 'best fit' principle. Where candidates do not deal equally effectively with all of the AOs, marks are adjusted upwards or downwards within and across levels in order to reflect fairly the balance of the candidates' achievements. Candidates should remember that they need to address contexts (both contexts of the production and of the reception of the texts) in a consistent and formative way throughout their answers in order to develop argument and to support the points they are making. More effective candidates successfully embed contextual material and, where appropriate, include evidence of wider reading, such as the views of critics.
4. The most successful responses to the questions in this section of the examination were those that spanned the range of the AOs in a controlled and assimilated fashion. The students who achieved the highest marks skilfully developed arguments relevant to the questions they had opted to answer and conveyed an overview of the most important elements across the text as a whole. The most effective responses also employed a variety of techniques to explore meaning analytically, incorporating considered discussion of contexts of production (e.g. relevant biographical, historical, social, religious, political or literary contexts) and contexts of reception (e.g. how contemporary views or events or textual adaptations) and the ways in which these contexts affect candidates' readings of the texts.
5. Less effective responses covered the AOs but without the cohesion and consistency required at the higher levels. Many students conveyed a good working knowledge of the texts and their contexts but tended to 'bolt on' contextual material rather than demonstrating how it affected and helped to shape readings of text. When writing about how meanings are shaped in texts, candidates tended to explore specific examples without making wider

reference to how their selections were illustrative of wider aspects of texts. Centres could assist candidates by providing them with an understanding of the novel as a genre:

- What is a novel?
- How do novels work?
- What narrative and other methods do writers of prose fiction employ?
- How does use of language differ in the novel to in other genres?

Such insights would assist students in relation to both AO2 and AO3.

6. Context is information that informs the understanding of a text. There are different kinds of context that affect a writer's work and a reader's response to it. Students should select relevant contextual material to illustrate and develop their response to the question. This could include:

- the author's own life and individual situation, including the place and time of writing, only where these relate to the text
- the historical setting, time and location of the text
- social and cultural contexts, e.g. attitudes in society, expectations of different cultural groups
- the literary context of the text, e.g. literary movements or genres.

### **Paper Summary**

Performance of this paper has been very pleasing and some excellent responses have been seen. Many candidates have gained marks in the top two levels and centres should be congratulated in preparing their candidates so well.

Based on performance on this paper, centres and candidates are offered the following advice for their future success:

- address the AOs for the relevant sections of the paper and use mark schemes and past papers to guide teaching
- encourage candidates to use a range of literary concepts and terminology to identify ways in which writers create meaning; discuss the effect of these techniques might have upon readers

- demonstrate awareness that readers are individuals – not all readers will see things in the same way; develop language to reflect what readers may (or may not) feel or think or understand
- for Section A, Post-2000 Poetry, encourage candidates to demonstrate a basic overarching understanding of the poems they are writing about before launching into analysis
- for Section B, Post-2000 Prose, ensure that candidates make appropriate references to contextual materials when writing about the chosen novels
- 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. It is important to remember that genre (the novel) is also a context and there is potentially much that candidates might say about this in relation to their selected texts. Context should be integrated and linked to the ideas and points being made, not simply bolted on as additional information – such bolt-on context does little to contribute to the creation of meaning.
- avoid narrative re-telling of the texts chosen for Section B. Narrative approaches are rarely successful.
- read the exact wording of the question carefully and answer this question, rather than one practised before the exam.

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