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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2022

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level
In English Literature (WET03)
Unit 3: Poetry and Prose

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Introduction

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

For this unit, WET03, the open book examination is 2 hours long and there are two sections.

All candidates must answer Section A, Question 1, Unseen Poetry. Candidates then respond to a question from Section B, Prose, on the two prose texts that they have studied.

For **Section A, Unseen Poetry**, candidates will use the reading and critical skills that they have learnt throughout the course. Candidates will answer one essay question on a post-1900 unseen poem that is printed on a separate Source Insert.

Context is not assessed in Section A of the paper.

For **Section B, Prose**, candidates answer one comparative essay question from a choice of two, on the two studied prose texts that they have studied. Candidates can select from the themes: *Growing Up*, *Colonisation and After*, *Science and Society* or *Women and Society*. Candidate responses should be informed by an understanding and appreciation of the contexts in which their chosen texts are both written and read. Candidates should be encouraged to view the texts in comparison to each other.

In Section B, students will study two out of a choice of three thematically linked texts. They will learn about:

- the importance of the relationship between texts, making connections and comparison 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 20 marks available for Section A and 30 for Section B.

The total number of 50 marks available for this paper represents 25% of IA2.

Section A, Unseen Poetry, assesses Assessment Objectives AO1 and AO2.

Section B, Prose, assesses Assessment Objectives AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO4.

AO5 is not assessed in this paper.

Please refer to the specification for details of the Assessment Objectives and their full weightings.

General Overview of the WET03 January 2022 (2201) paper and performance

Although there was a small entry, this has been a successful paper. There were no errors, no erratum notices and no changes made to the mark scheme.

All candidates must answer Section A, Question 1, Unseen Poetry. Candidates then respond to a question from Section B, Prose. For this series, a full range of marks was awarded.

The unseen poem for Question 1 was *The Wedding* by Moniza Alvi. This was a discriminating poem that allowed for a varying range and depth of interpretations. As in previous series, responses covered the full range of marks with most placed within levels 2-4. Again, as in previous series, candidates who rooted their explorations of theme, perspective and idea in a sound understanding of poetic form and language were more successful than candidates who led with analysis of technique.

It was evident that some candidates had not spent sufficient time on Question 1 before moving to Section B of the paper and, therefore, were not able to fully develop the ideas and points that they were making.

In the Prose section, the most popular theme was *Science and Society* (Questions 6 and 7) with the second most popular theme *Women and Society* (Questions 8 and 9). There were few responses to *Growing Up* (Questions 2 and 3), but more than for the January 2021 series on this section, and few for *Colonisation and After* (Questions 4 and 5). All texts had responses written on them in this exam series and many candidates were placed in Level 3-5.

As with previous exam series, written expression is clear and many candidates are meeting the requirements of writing fluently and accurately, conveying their knowledge and understanding of their studied texts effectively. There were few examples where the intended meaning was not clear or was hampered by poor expression. However, there are a significant number of candidates who are not adequately planning their responses prior to writing and would benefit from spending more time thinking through the key words in the question before they begin to answer it. Handwriting was sometimes an issue and candidates should also endeavour to make this as clear as possible.

There were few responses at all that treated the studied texts as separate entities and it was pleasing to see many candidates making points of comparisons between the novels. The most successful responses made comparisons that were detailed and specific – particularly on the relative historical and literary contexts of the texts – rather than broad and general.

However, not all assessment objectives (AO) were considered equally in candidates' responses with some uneven coverage that hindered progression through the mark scheme. Some candidates, for instance, had not considered the specific structural, linguistic and literary techniques employed by their chosen writers and did not, therefore, always successfully meet the requirements of AO1. Other candidates had not considered context sufficiently enough.

Section A: Post-1900 Unseen Poetry

Question 1

The unseen poem for Question 1 was *The Wedding* by Moniza Alvi. This was a successful, discriminating poem that allowed for access of the full range of marks. Many responses considered the poem in depth and were placed in Level 3 and above. There were few responses in Level 1.

The most successful responses had a command of the poem and were able to range across it, covering all of the assessment objectives and demonstrating a controlled application or critically evaluative approach. The selection of material and discussion of meaning and voice was particularly good in these responses with a placement in Level 4 or 5.

A range of interpretations and meanings were offered by candidates. Many responses focussed on the concept of the 'wedding' as a metaphor for migration, the cultural differences that the persona or poet might perceive between Pakistan and England and the personal relationship between the speaker and the 'bridegroom'. Responses awarded at Level 4 and above were able to explore the uncertainty or sense of disappointment in the tone of the speaker ('I expected') and the contrast between expectation and reality.

The majority of candidates explored the structure of the poem and this was handled with varying success. The best responses were able to explore the use of free verse and enjambment, linking these techniques with the development of the internal structure of the poem and the tone of the speaker. However, a significant number of candidates either began their responses by identifying the number of stanzas and lines or by looking for metrical and rhythmic structures that were not used within the poem (e.g. blank verse). Comments on structure should be anchored to an exploration of meaning and theme in order to meet the demands of AO2 at Level 3 and to show that candidates can demonstrate knowledge of how meanings are shaped in texts. Isolated examination of structural technique is rarely successful and detracts from other, better comment that could be made on the poet's ideas or use of voice.

Many candidates identified the use of metaphor, simile and techniques such as sibilance (such as in 'sandalwood smugglers'). Some of the best responses explored the language used within the title (*'The Wedding'*) itself, noting the use of the determiner rather than a pronoun and speculating as to its link to the wider meaning of the poem.

Most candidates were able to identify the semantic field of travel but few explored in depth the imagery of 'maps' contained within the last, isolated line. Several high scoring responses dug into this last line, analysing the nuances of 'imprints... on our hands' and its indication that the couple within the poem could find their way into their future together.

Evidence needs to be used consistently to meet the demands of AO1. Candidates performed best where they used precise quotation to support their points rather than longer quotations where the language choices were not analysed in full. Candidates should be encouraged to spend time at the beginning of the examination reading and annotating the poem before planning what they want

to say. **The briefness of some responses indicated that some candidates are not spending sufficient time doing this on Question 1 before moving onto Section B and their studied prose texts.** This was often a mistake, as some candidates laid the foundations of often very good or insightful interpretations that were then not developed further through rigorous analysis with detailed reference to the poem. This was reflected in their progress through the levels on the mark scheme. **Candidates need to spend sufficient time on this question in order to access the full range of marks.**

For this section of the paper, candidates are required to show knowledge and understanding of the function of genre features, conventions in poetry, and demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of a range of ways to read texts, including reading for detail of how writers use and adapt language, form and structure in texts and by responding critically and creatively.

It is recommended that centres continue to make use of the *Sample Assessment Materials* and past papers in order to become even more familiar with the assessment requirements. The mark grids demonstrate how candidates can progress from one level to the next. In order to achieve Level 4 or above, responses need to be discriminating, critical and evaluative. Analysis of the poem should be controlled and well supported with evidence and close reference to the techniques used and should provide examples of the nuances and subtleties of the writer's craft.

The Unseen Poetry question assesses AO1 and AO2:

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.

Context is not assessed in Section A of the paper.

Section B: Prose

As with the January 2021 series, centres should be congratulated on having prepared candidates thoroughly under difficult and often challenging circumstances. A full range of marks was awarded for this section, with many responses placing in Level 3 or higher. As in previous series, responses were varied. Many candidates demonstrated a good understanding of their chosen texts, writing essays that were perceptive and supported with precise textual reference as well as exploring literary and historical contexts. Lower achieving responses either fell into the trap of re-telling the plot of the novels or didn't concentrate on the specific focus of the question enough.

In order to meet the demands of AO1, candidates must reference 'associated concepts and terminology'. This was handled with varying degrees of success. In the best responses the writer's voice, structure and other linguistic and literary techniques were embedded successfully into the candidate's argument. Where this was done successfully (for instance, in comparison of the use of symbolism

in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Never Let Me Go*), linguistic examples were chosen with discrimination and illuminated the point being made.

AO3 asks candidates to comment on the link between a text and its context. Relevant contextual comment can include reference to the social and historical background of a text as well as its literary context or the life of the writer. The most successful responses were discriminating in the contextual comment that they provided or made apt and perceptive contextual comparisons between the texts. There were very few responses this series to *Colonisation and After* (Questions 4 and 5) but contextual comment was particularly strong in this section, with candidates rewarded in Levels 4 and 5 for making pertinent comments about the Modernist genre or Achebe's reception of *Heart of Darkness*. The least successful responses often featured contextual comment as a 'bolted on' aspect rather than an integral point of comparison between texts.

There were few responses that considered the texts studied as separate entities, but it should be noted that in some cases comparisons were either slim or vague. Some candidates are using discourse markers such as 'similarly' to indicate that they are comparing one text to the other but are then not making comparative points that are specific or detailed enough.

Due to the small number of entries, and responses for each question, comments are based on the limited evidence seen and can only be included for the most popular questions.

Questions 2 and 3: Growing Up

The set texts for the theme of Growing Up are: *What Maisie Knew*, *Great Expectations* and *The Color Purple*.

There were few responses for the Growing Up option although all of the texts were considered. Question 2 had the higher number of responses and is considered in more detail.

Question 2: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present characters who have a destructive influence on the development of others.

Candidates explored the various ways in which characters can have a destructive influence upon the development of others and were successfully able to link this to the bildungsroman genre. Points made included: the physical and sexual abuse that Celie suffers from Alphonso and Mr.- and how it has a destructive effect on her self-esteem; the influence of Miss Havisham and Estella over Pip and the devastating effect that Ida and Beale Farange's divorce has on Maisie.

Responses explored how a destructive influence can often be a force for change on the development of a character, with one high Level 4 scoring response that compared *The Color Purple* and *Great Expectations* noting that the change brought about by characters with a destructive influence is often necessary within the novel for the spiritual and moral growth of a character.

On the whole, candidates tended to explore the impact of main characters rather than looking at the role of secondary characters or contrasting a destructive influence with one that is more positive. Contextual comment was often quite broad and undeveloped although some responses made sophisticated points about the context of Victorian morality.

Questions 6 and 7: Science and Society

The set texts for the theme of Science and Society are: *Never Let Me Go*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Frankenstein*.

This was once again the most popular theme on the paper with an even distribution between the set texts. Question 6 had the most responses.

Question 6: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts explore the effects on characters of social pressures.

This was a question open to a range of interpretations and ideas presented included the internalisation of social pressure by individuals living under constant surveillance in the totalitarian state of Gilead; questions regarding the ethics and morality of cloning as presented in *Never Let Me Go* and the pressure placed upon the clones as a result; the pressure felt by both Walton and Victor Frankenstein in *Frankenstein*.

Candidates also explored how social pressure is enacted upon the bodies of characters or used to control them within the studied texts, such as in *The Handmaid's Tale* where the very existence of Handmaids is dependent upon their fertility and ability to produce children. This was well compared with the lack of bodily autonomy presented in both *Frankenstein* and *Never Let Me Go*.

Terminology and related concepts were explored well in this question. High scoring responses explored the symbolism of the 'wall' and eyes in *The Handmaid's Tale* and fences in *Never Let Me Go* as physical reminders of how characters are pressured into obedience by their respective societies.

Relevant contextual comment was often integrated well into responses for this option, with one candidate in particular linking the social pressures presented in *Frankenstein* to the social upheaval and revolution experienced across Europe during the time of the novel's production.

Question 7: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts build narrative tension within their novels.

This question was not as popular as Question 6, but candidates were able to respond confidently. Again, as with Question 6, there was an even distribution of responses across the set texts. Candidates were asked to explore how writers build narrative tension and a range of comments were made.

There were some perceptive and insightful points made about the narrative forms and voices of each text, for instance: the use of an epistolary format and multiple narrative voices in *Frankenstein*; non-linear structures and the

connection with the reader in *The Handmaid's Tale*; the ways in which narrators can be unreliable and how they reveal events and information.

Some excellent points were made about fragmented narratives and how they are used to build tension. AO1 was strong for this question but some candidates did not provide enough contextual comment. This would have been a good opportunity for candidates to explore the literary context of their studied texts and to link this to technique.

Questions 8 and 9: Women and Society

The set texts for the theme of Women and Society are: *Wuthering Heights*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *Beloved*.

This was the second most popular theme on the paper. The most popular texts were *Wuthering Heights* and *Beloved*. There were fewer responses on *Mrs Dalloway* and comment is limited to the most popular novels.

Question 8: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts explore the shaping influence of the past.

A range of responses and interpretations were provided for this question and candidates explored – often in detail – the effects of the past and the influence that it has. There were no responses on *Mrs Dalloway*. Points made included Sethe being consumed by the guilt of killing her child in *Beloved* and how this has affected her; how Sethe's past and present combine; the use of the device of ghosts and hauntings in both *Wuthering Heights* and *Beloved* to express past trauma. Some apt and detailed comparisons, in particular, were made. In particular, one candidate wrote eloquently about the links between the characters of Heathcliff and Sethe, linking them to the universal experience of suffering and the limit, ultimately, of the past on the present. This was an enjoyable response to read and demonstrated how a tightly focussed answer that selects its material with discernment can meet the criteria for Level 5.

In some responses, the comparisons made between the two studied texts were stronger than the comment provided on linguistic and literary technique or context. At times, focus on the question was not maintained consistently or wandered away from its brief and some candidates made arguments that did not specifically meet the demands of the question.

Question 9: Compare the ways in which the writers of your two chosen texts present women who experience isolation.

Candidates did respond to *Mrs Dalloway* on this option although it was not as popular a text as *Wuthering Heights* or *Beloved*. Candidates could have written and did about a range of different ways in which the female characters experience isolation, from Sethe's isolation in slavery and then from her community due to her actions to Cathy's isolation from Heathcliff and Clarissa Dalloway's increasing sense of isolation. Explorations of how isolation could have been self-imposed or imposed from external sources could also have been discussed.

As was the case with Question 8, it was clear that many candidates knew the novels well, but in some cases seemed to be writing about aspects of the novel that did not always have relevant links to the question set. It is imperative that candidates focus on the key words in the question and consider how they might be relevant to their understanding of it. Responses made apt comparisons between the set texts although as, with some other question options, consideration of context did not always extend beyond social and historical information and was not always integrated well into the response.

Paper Summary

Performance of this paper has been very pleasing and there have been many marks awarded in the top two levels. Centres should be congratulated on preparing their candidates so well.

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

- address the assessment objectives and use mark schemes and past papers to guide teaching
- incorporation of linguistic and literary technique into an exploration of texts is important. Candidates should be encouraged to use a range of terminology to support their points on how writers create meaning and the effect that this has on the reader
- for Section A, encourage candidates to discuss a broad understanding of the poem and its overarching ideas before moving into a close analysis of poetic technique. Candidates should spend some time carefully reading, annotating and planning before they start to write their response. **Ensure that enough time is given to this section of paper**
- for Section B, narrative approaches are rarely successful in meeting the demands of the assessment objectives. Candidates must consider the writer's techniques in order to meet the demands of AO1. Narrative approaches are rarely successful in meeting the demands of the assessment objectives and candidates should be steered away from providing an overview of plot and content in the novels they have studied
- in order to meet the demands of AO3, students must consider the contextual factors surrounding the production and reception of the novels. Examples should fit the points being made
- read the wording of the question carefully and spend some time planning the response
- enjoy sharing your knowledge and enthusiasm for the novels studied with the examiner.

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