Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In English Language and Literature (8EL0_02)
Paper 02: Varieties in Language and Literature

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Section A

As in previous years, The Great Gatsby was the most popular choice of question, dwarfing the other text choices. Candidates tended to display a good level of knowledge of the texts they had studied. However in order to move up through the grades many candidates would benefit from being more detailed and discriminating in their discussions. All candidates found something in the question that they could anchor their response to and were able to offer relevant discussion points.

Many candidates were less balanced in their approach to the question in Section A than in previous years. Candidates should be encouraged to explore the extract and the writer's craft and present an analytical response to this. Relevant points from the wider novel and relevant contextual factors should be integrated in their response. Often candidates were neglected an element of the question or being too generic in their responses/deviating from the question set. Conversely, candidates who engaged fully with all aspects of the question tended to be successful. Due to the time given to complete this exam, candidates are encouraged to begin their analysis at the start of their answer. Frequently candidates who write lengthy introductions are restricting their capacity to write a detailed and varied response.

It was also noted this year that the range of linguistic and literary terms being discussed had significantly decreased. Whilst feature spotting is to be avoided, it is vital that candidates are able to confidently discuss the writer's craft and how this is demonstrated in the extract, and wider novel. Candidates who do not manage this often miss the potential to move up through the levels as they do not achieve highly in terms of AO1 and AO2. Similarly, many candidates took a literary approach at the expense of using both a literary and linguistic lens. This also led to a more limited response by the candidates. There were numerous responses where candidates successfully deployed an integrated literary and linguistic approach and were rewarded for their efforts with many perceptive comments made about subtleties in language use and the resonance across the wider novel.

In the main, candidates are able to discuss contextual factors. The success of this varies across the levels. At the top end, candidates who are able to integrate contextual factors into their arguments are the most successful. These candidates show an appreciation for the environment the text was created in without relaying everything they have learnt about this aspect of the text. Appropriate selection is key. Common in the lower levels is the tendency to provide detailed biographies or to bolt on paragraphs about context that has only tenuous links to the question.

Question 1: In general, responses for the Gatsby extract for Section A were handled well by most candidates. For some lower to middle level responses, there were some shadows of pre-prepared and/or class work material being moulded towards this task. That said these were in a minority. Some middle to higher level scripts (or those looking towards the level 4 areas and above) were focussed and efficient in their deconstruction of the extract, with some offering some impressively close readings. Quite a few of these responses seemed to lose sight of the wider novel however, so in effect became a tad self-penalising in accessing the higher levels and/or marks.

Overall in a large majority of the Gatsby responses, the use and influence of contextual factors in reading the text was successful. Some scripts deployed enhanced skills in discussing contexts and their links to the texts. Others went further by developing an interpretation of the novel through the lens of the extract and spurred by the task which was underpinned by a range of useful comments on context. The idea of relevance in regards to AO3 seems to be taking hold, balanced with still some unwelcome echoes of 'bolted on' contextual links.

Question 2: Many candidates chose to explore Pip and Miss Havisham in responding to this question. Many candidates chose to focus on the novel as a whole rather than the extract which limited the depth of their responses. Comments on the interaction between Pip and Mr Wopsle tended to be undeveloped or absent. Candidates tended to take a generalised approach to the text and attempted to cover a range of characters but often without depth or analysis. With such a large novel to manage, candidates might improve their marks by planning their response and choosing a more narrow range of elements to discuss. Many candidates also spent considerable time discussing context rather than the extract/topic. This again tended to limit responses as they had a tendency to become unbalanced. More successful candidates mentioned Samuel Smiles which was a very relevant and interesting reflection.

Question 3: Candidates discussed a range of elements of the text and displayed a good understanding of the novel. However, not all candidates tied their discussions to the exam question. Many responses focused on George's relationship with Kenny and his neighbours and how this affects his behaviour. Candidates displayed a good understanding of relevant contextual factors. A literary approach was often taken in answering the question which tended to be self limiting in terms of AO1.

Question 4: Candidates who engaged fully with the question and the extract produced interesting responses. In the main, candidates took a more literary approach to the extract and tended not to cover a range of techniques deployed by the writer. Answers tended to take a more generalised approach to the question rather than being consistently analytical. Many candidates took a long time setting up an essay type response which often prevented them from engaging with all three aspects of the question. More successful candidates were able to appreciate the contrast in settings and were able to draw on other relevant aspects of the novel to continue their discussions. Candidates displayed knowledge of contextual factors but often these were not always relevant to the question. Candidates who took this broad approach limited the overall quality of their response.

Question 7: Overall candidates engaged well with the extract and demonstrated an understanding of the central elements of the narrative. Candidates however often needed to develop this further and take an analytical response to Rhys' crafting, many struggled to comment on the significance of the devices used in the extract. Many candidates tended to make general statements about the nature of travel in the text and relied on stock points about ´´crossing boundaries´´ without focusing on the meaning of relocation and the significance of it. The feelings of the central characters were explored but often this was in general terms.

Question 8: Candidates created many interesting responses to this question and engaged well with the extract and wider question. Candidates took a range of approaches and provided thoughtful responses on confinement and views of 'madness' in society. The wider novel was managed

successfully with many pertinent arguments being developed. Context was integrated into developed arguments and utilised to support a line of reasoning.

Section B

It was pleasing to see that candidates are developing a greater analytical vocabulary when responding to Section B questions. Specific elements of language and structure, as well as specific exemplification, have been used to develop thoughtful arguments. Many responses strived to present an integrated literary and linguistic approach to the question rather than summarising the relevant events in the work they have studied.

Overall, candidates would benefit from a greater appreciation of the genre of the text they have studied. Many candidates do not consider staging or form when discussing plays and poetry. It is important that the medium the writer chose is considered when responding to the question set. Often candidates commented on the rhyme schemes of individual poems but this tended to be descriptive rather than analytical.

Candidates who were selective with the material they chose to discuss and consistently tied their arguments to the question were successful. Candidates should be encouraged to plan their answer, especially those who are using a longer text for this section. Many candidates begin strongly but waver off topic as their answer progresses. A more focused response would benefit a range of candidates. Often candidates summarise sections of the text that are related to the question without being analytical and therefore restrict the potential mark for their answer.

Question 9: This was the most popular option with a large proportion of answers discussing Othello and The Whitsun Weddings. Centres teaching poetry collections could spend more time developing points that relate specifically to the poetic devices employed by poets, in this case by Larkin. Once again, as with Fitzgerald in section A, the nature of their personal lives made for many tangents in student responses. The nature of death within texts provided a good focus for students to relate to in their essays, however, stronger responses were able to explore this in relation to the writer´s social commentary which provided more meaningful consideration. Students should be reminded of the need to focus on the wording of questions, for example ´´the impact of´´ in order to help them develop stronger arguments and clearer points of analysis. In Othello, weaker responses tended to summarize the deaths that take place and there was surprisingly little focus on the impact of the final scene. Again, weaker responses were relying on a lengthy description of Desdemona´s death instead of considering the impact. Often candidates deviated from the topic of death and instead discussed racism in the text, this was with limited success as comments tended to lose focus on the question. With Larkin, students explored examples of deaths in poems but few were really considering how this impacted the speaker. There were interesting discussions on 'Mr Bleaney' and 'Take One Home for the Kiddies'. 'An Arundel Tomb' was a popular choice which was explored with differing levels of success.

Question 10: Candidates who discussed Much Ado About Nothing really explored it well with the nature of ´´intolerance´´ acting as a determiner between stronger and weaker answers. Those who focused on the question obviously were able to develop a more meaningful analysis of the text. Few considered MAAN or Betrayal as a piece of theatre, centres would be well advised to focus on teaching genre with sharper focus. Candidates produced a range of responses for Plath's poetry.

There were some interesting discussions on body image and societal pressures at the higher end. Lower level responses tended to summarise a range of personal issues Plath faced.

Question 12: There were several strong responses on Rossetti with candidates selecting well across the collection to discuss differing roles of women. Some candidates lost focus when commenting on Goblin Market and would often summarise rather than discuss the text and the writer's craft. Understanding of, and utilisation of, context was typically strong. It was pleasing to see that candidates felt comfortable selecting material across the collection. Other popular texts for this question were *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Dracula,* for both texts the roles of women in society dominated the discussions. There were several strong responses on Dracula with many candidates looking at crossing literal and metaphorical roles and boundaries. Candidates were able to make relevant comments on context when responding to A Raisin in the Sun however many candidates provided character summaries rather than a developed discussion on roles.

Candidates need to ensure that they are fully engaging with the question. Many candidates lapse into discussing the concept of 'crossing boundaries' without focusing on the wording of the question and therefore limit their response by selecting material that is not relevant to what is being asked of them. This is a key issue for this question.