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Examiners' Report  
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2022

Pearson Edexcel IAL  
In English Literature (WET0 01)  
Unit 1: Post-2000 Poetry and Prose

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## Introduction

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## Standard Introduction

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*, *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.

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

## **General Overview of the WET01 January 2022 (2201) 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 in the light of the on-going COVID-19 pandemic has been pleasing and we are hopeful this will continue into future series of the examination. Some centres have done a very effective job in preparing their students for the demands of the specification even in the face of the challenges of the last two years, and many candidates have managed to engage effectively with the demands of the examination and 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. On other occasions, responses were somewhat hampered by less effective choices of second poem that did not allow for the development of appropriate connections. It is important to note that AO4 is assessed in this section of the examination. Many candidates explored possible interpretations of the poems and the methods the poets had employed. It is useful for candidates to look to establish an initial overview of the poems' potential meanings and how these connect in order to establish a firm basis for their developing argument before moving on and delving deeper for metaphorical meanings and offering interpretations of the poems.

In Section B, the most popular prose text studied section was *The Kite Runner* (Questions 3 and 4). The second most popular text was *The White Tiger* (Questions 7 and 8), though there were also similar numbers of responses on *Life of Pi* (Questions 5 and 6) and *Brooklyn* (Questions 9 and 10). The least popular selection was *Purple Hibiscus* (Questions 11 and 12). Many responses gained marks in the top two levels although, at times, candidates did not sufficiently cover all Assessment Objectives thus preventing the achievement of marks at the top ends of level ranges. A common error was that in Section B some candidates did not consider contextual factors (in spite of specific guidance in the question to do so) 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).

The specification states that candidates are required to communicate fluently, accurately and effectively their knowledge, understanding and critical evaluation of texts. However, there are candidates who do not present developed responses, whose control of language is not clear and

fluent, and who present brief and narrative answers rather than exploring the meanings of the 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 brief, surface comments on quotations rather than exploring more thoroughly the ways in which language and other shaping devices are used to create meaning. There were also responses that lacked the expected knowledge of concepts, technical terminology and approaches required for award in the higher levels. There were also some excellent, crafted responses that were a pleasure to read.

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 (73 responses)**

The nominated poem for Question 1 was 'On Her Blindness' by Adam Thorpe. The poem was compared to a variety of other poems from the anthology, the most popular being 'Effects', 'Material' and 'To My Nine-Year-Old Self'. These, on the whole, lent themselves well to a consideration of 'painful emotions'. The combination of 'On Her Blindness' with 'Effects' – poems both dealing with the relationship between mothers and sons – proved a particularly effective choice. Other choices of poem, such as 'Eat Me' and 'Giuseppe' proved less effective and offered comparisons that appeared more 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 developed detailed and effective connections between the nominated and selected poems and drew on a variety of methods the poets employ to shape meanings. Some students were able to write with sophistication and control, identifying a variety of ways in which the poems dealt with emotions of different kinds, offering probing and enlightening analysis of literary and linguistic techniques. Weaker responses tended to adopt a more simplistic approach to emotions and did not always engage with the idea of why these might be seen as painful. Stronger responses explored the idea of painful emotion and their effects in more nuanced fashion.

In the following extract, for instance, the candidate displays evidence of strong and discriminating analysis:

his siblings. Another phrase "watching, somewhere" suggests ~~a~~ hope, ~~that~~  
~~the mother is participating and so the~~ Their mother was blind when alive,  
but she now has sight in the afterlife. Although Thorpe's persona feels  
hope, he acknowledges and feels the pain from ~~his mother~~ the loss of  
his mother. ~~Similarly in~~ Contrastingly in "Effects", the narrator feels  
that his mother "could not know" that he was back for her. He feels  
no hope, just ~~was~~ a complete sense of loss and pain. Finally,

## Question 2 (21 responses)

The nominated poem for Question 2 was 'The Furthest Distances I've Travelled' by Leontia Flynn. Candidates provided some effective discussion of 'alternative visions of life', using a range of second poems to explore the varied ideas this might lead to and the kinds of connection and ambiguity these suggest. Popular comparisons were with 'The Map-Woman' and 'Deliverer'.

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 in which candidates had approached the task with connection in mind and that drew on a variety of ways in which the poets seek to shape meaning. Some students wrote effectively about the ways in which Flynn uses the metaphor of travel as a way of evaluating experience and life, comparing this to other ideas related to journeying and its metaphorical connotations. Such candidates were able to write in controlled and often effective fashion about the poems, identifying a variety of ways in which visions of life are 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 offer an overview of their 'reading' of the poems they are writing about 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. 'painful emotions' or 'alternative visions of life'). The best candidates established a clear sense of how the poems related to the themes of their chosen question and what this might mean before proceeding to explore the poets' literary approaches and techniques to draw out how meanings are shaped.

2. In the Post-2000 Poetry section, candidates are required to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the features and conventions of poetry. They also need to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the significance of poetic form and structure. Detailing of rhyme schemes and stanza forms without any reference to why these might be significant in shaping meaning is of limited use, however. Students need to demonstrate a critical response to how such features are significant in the texts.

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 (34 responses)**

This question was the more popular of the two questions on *The Kite Runner* and the most popular prose question on the paper. The idea of intolerance was understood and used in relation to variety of issues in the novel: politics, religion and gender proved popular focuses for analysis of the novel. Key examples tended to centre around Assef and the rape scene, Baba's intolerance of Amir's nature, Amir's impatience with and ultimate betrayal of Hassan, religious intolerance between branches of Islam, gender intolerance and double standards, and ethnic intolerance between Pashtuns and Hazaras. Higher achieving candidates were able to focus on the ways in which Afghan society, with its developing political and religious conflicts, is fundamentally built upon intolerance. More able candidates considered the ways in which a variety of contextual factors influence readers' understanding of the issues Hosseini presents. For the most part, contextual knowledge was good and contributed effectively to responses.

In this example, the candidate makes clear and embedded use of contextual material in relation to the ethnic contexts of *The Kite Runner*:

Firstly, Hosseini shows intolerance by linking to different Regimes and especially Assef, who embodies intolerance and racism throughout the Novel. We can see from the use of language used when Assef is talking how intolerance goes a one in one with Assef throughout the novel. Assef discriminates Hassan due to his ethnicity, which is very common in Afghanistan as Pashtuns and Hazaras have a different heritage and Hazaras are only 9% of the population in Afghanistan are Hazaras and 49% Pashtuns, showing how

#### **Question 4 (9 responses)**

The question invited candidates to consider the role of changing perspectives and their effect upon characters' understanding in the novel. There were good instances of candidates considering a variety of shifts in perspective in the novel, relating to geographical, religious, psychological and societal changes. It was pleasing to see some candidates considering Hosseini's use of structure to reflect changes in perspective and to see them engaging with contextual material in relation to ideas of characters' developing understanding. Some candidates demonstrated understanding of the significance of reading the novel as a *bildungsroman* with its central ideas of development and change. Candidates were, in general, able to make use of a range of appropriate contextual material to support their responses.

#### **Life of Pi**

#### **Questions 5 (14 responses)**

This question required candidates to consider the significance of Martel's use of animals in the novel. Some candidates were able to explore the metaphorical and symbolic significance of Martel's use of animals, though a number of candidates simply recounted examples of the appearance of animals in the novel without recourse to a wider understanding of why they



are significant to Pi. Almost absent was any recognition of the significance of Martel's use of animal fable as a means of telling his tale. Particularly notable by its absence was reference to contextual material. Centres must recognise the specific requirement for candidates to use contextual material in this section of the paper.

### **Question 6 (2 responses)**

This question required candidates to consider the extent to which problems are resolved in the novel. Only two candidates selected it. In responding to this task, it is important to recognise the extent to which the novel deliberately resists the idea of resolution, leaving readers instead with a sense of unresolved tensions. Again, particularly notable by its absence was reference to contextual material. Centres must recognise the specific requirement for candidates to use contextual material in this section of the paper.

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

#### **Question 7 (5 responses)**

There were some competent responses in relation to Adiga's use of female characters, tending to focus on the roles of Balram's Grandmother and Pinky Madam. However, there was tendency in some cases to rely on a recount of the events in which these female characters are involved rather than engaging in a deeper consideration of their significance to the unfolding narrative. Candidates provided some consideration of contextual issues related to the novel and its use of female characters, but this could have been more effectively developed to reflect both production and reception contexts. In relation to the shaping of meaning, it would have been good to see candidates considering the ways in which Adiga creates (and negates) the voices of his female characters.

#### **Question 8 (13 responses)**

Candidates answering this question offered a good variety of response to the idea of poverty, considering a range of ways in which this idea might be understood. By and large, candidates revealed a sound knowledge of the text and offered relevant illustrations. Several candidates chose to explore the concept of the Rooster Coop, darkness and light and the caste system in relation to the terms of the question. Some focused on Adiga's relentlessly pessimistic view of Indian society, while others explored the contrast between Balram's situation and those of people such as Mr Ashok and used this as a basis for interesting contrasts. Contextual ideas were generally well represented, but there tended to be a less secure focus on Adiga's style of writing and the construction of the novel.

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

### **Question 9 (5 responses)**

The question's focus on Father Flood tended to evoke narrative responses to the task. Candidates tended to refer to situations in the novel in which Father Flood is involved rather than engaging in a discussion of his significance as a character. The character could have been explored in relation to the economic problems in the 1950s and in relation to the American dream, but candidates did not explore what these contexts might have added to readers' understanding of Father Flood and his role and his influence on the lives of other characters portrayed in the novel. Some candidates tended to resort to a narrative approach rather than engaging in more targeted and developed discussion about Father Flood and his role in the narrative, and there was little engagement with contextual issues. Centres must recognise the specific requirement for candidates to use contextual material in this section of the paper.

### **Question 10 (10 responses)**

Candidates referred to a number of the journeys, both literal and metaphorical, that characters experience in the course of the novel. Responses, however, tended to be narrative rather than analytical or critical in nature. Again, responses tended to be thin on contextual knowledge related to migration and the post-war world, which could have contributed to the depth of response. Ireland's economic difficulties in the 1950s as a context for migration, for example, or the contexts of post-Fascist Italy might also have been relevant. These contexts would have enriched candidates' readings of the lived experiences of emigrants such as Eilis and Tony and their families. Centres must recognise the specific requirement for candidates to use contextual material in this section of the paper. On the whole, most answers tended to lack critical and analytical detail. Centres should consider how these issues could be addressed for future examination series.

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

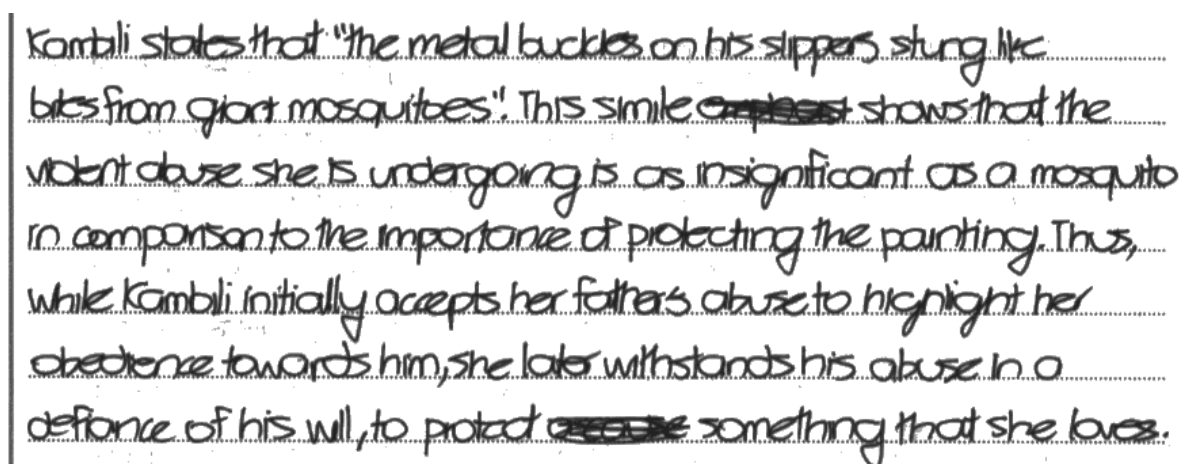
### **Question 11 (1 response)**

This question required candidates to consider the idea of a divided society. This was a wealthy idea in relation to the novel, and it could have been addressed at a number of levels within the text. Contextual information regarding Nigerian society and its changes was obviously relevant, as would have been discussion of the novel's structure and Adichie's use of language and symbolism in the novel.

### Question 12 (6 responses)

This question required a focus on the novel's use of violence. Candidates' responses recognised the importance of this idea at individual, familial and societal levels. Kambili's, Jaja's and their mother's experiences, for example are considered in detail, as are broader societal treatments of violence (e.g. at the University, and in relation to Ade Coker and how these might be understood in relation to the wider world and contexts for the novel. Some candidates commented upon the idea of political corruption and the ways in which it relates to violence. Some commented on the fact that *Purple Hibiscus* is a form of *bildungsroman*, exploring how violence can shape the development of the individual.

Here is an example of a candidate demonstrating very efficiently how to embed textual reference and to use this as a basis for sophisticated analysis:



Kambili states that "the metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes". This simile ~~expresses~~ shows that the violent abuse she is undergoing is as insignificant as a mosquito in comparison to the importance of protecting the painting. Thus, while Kambili initially accepts her father's abuse to highlight her obedience towards him, she later withstands his abuse in a defiance of his will, to protect ~~essence~~ something that she loves.

### General Observations on Section B

1. 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 effectively 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 AO3. This was especially noticeable for candidates writing on *Life of Pi* and *Brooklyn*. Centres teaching these two texts should be especially alert to the requirements relating to AO3.

3. 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.
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 tended to lack the cohesion and consistency required at A level. This was especially evident in relation to AO2 and AO3. Contexts when they appeared at all tended to 'bolt on' rather than demonstrating understanding of how contexts affect and help 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 in this paper has been generally pleasing and some excellent responses have been seen. Some candidates have gained marks in the top two levels and centres should be congratulated in preparing their candidates efficiently.

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 thinking
- 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 their 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 writers and readers. 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.
- read the exact wording of the question carefully and answer this question, rather than one practised before the exam.

Thank you.

Principal Examiner  
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