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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

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In English Literature (8ET0_02)

Paper 2: Prose

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GCE English Literature 8ET0 02

Introduction

This year, there were a smaller number of candidates undertaking this qualification, so not all of the possible texts or thematic concerns were addressed. Science and Society accounted for more than half of all entries. The Supernatural and Women in Society continue to be popular themes while there were limited responses to Childhood, Crime and Detection and Colonisation and its Aftermath. Most centres chose to compare a pre-1900 text with a post 1900 text.

It was evident that many candidates had extensive knowledge of their chosen texts with responses demonstrating close reading and the ability to make appropriate connections. Centres had prepared their candidates to address the Assessment Objectives for this component and it is hoped that this report will provide further guidance to improve examination performance.

In response to centre feedback, this year's candidates have had an additional 15 minutes to complete the examination. Many students felt that this time should be spent on writing more content, therefore centres should remind candidates that this time would be best employed on planning. Indeed, planning is an integral part of a successful response and there should be greater encouragement of this examination skill. If anything, candidates are now writing too much unplanned material. The ability to write concisely to a high standard in a limited time is a discriminator.

Centres are reminded that it is possible for candidates to approach the questions with relevant content and interpretations beyond what was given in the indicative content.

AO1

Overall, the majority of candidates were able to maintain focus on the question and express their arguments with clarity and employ appropriate, embedded references to the texts. Candidates attaining higher levels began their responses with a strong opening thesis that defined what they understood the key idea in the question to be, and allowed for a structured argument with points illustrated by short, embedded quotation. There was also evidence of candidates expressing their points in an appropriate critical style.

Candidates performing at Level 2 often listed a range of undeveloped points. Subject terminology, if included, was used to excess and question focus was not sustained. Some responses included very little reference to the texts.

Centres should remind candidates to explore texts from a more holistic perspective, rather than addressing the minutiae of specific chapters/plot events.

There continued to be evidence of candidates attempting to adapt practice essay material to the questions posed, which then affected the quality of the argument. With detailed knowledge of the texts, students should feel confident to respond to whatever questions are posed in the examination.

This is an example of an effective introduction to question 11. There is an immediate drawing upon connections and clear sense of the direction being taken in response to the question focus on marriage:

The experience of Woolf and Bronte in society shows clear influence on their texts. Both writers argue that marriage and the experiences women face through it are the key factors for the oppression and restrictions women face in society. While in the Victorian era the constraints of marriage are portrayed as more assertive and physically harmful on women, the more modern text presents the development of marital relationships by presenting the still constricting but less damaging aspect that exists in marriage. Although the two texts 'Mrs Dalloway' and 'Wuthering Heights' present an entrapment in marriage in both novels a positive light emerges towards the end of the novels where for the next generation, marriage has the potential to become more liberal.

AO2

This should continue to be an area of focus for centres and their candidates as answers should be demonstrating an awareness of how writers craft their texts.

Candidates performing at Levels 4 and 5 recognised that texts were constructed for a variety of purposes. They showed a sustained understanding of how meanings were shaped in the novels, with analysis of a wide range of methods being integrated throughout the essay. Such responses also explored how narrative technique and perspective was employed to suggest meaning.

In less successful responses, the application of writer's craft was either omitted or limited to vague references about genre and diction. Conversely, some candidates provided a catalogue of literary devices, yet did not offer any comment regarding how specific techniques may have aided the reader in shaping meaning. Methods addressed tended to be focused on a writer's use of simile or metaphor and there was a heavy reliance on word-level analysis.

This extract from a response to question 12 is an example of AO2, but also highlights how better responses display an ability to combine the Assessment Objectives in a point. This candidate addresses the question directly, while keeping a firm focus on the crafting of the text. There is also evidence of evaluating a writer's narrative choices, alongside some reference to literary context:

Both Hardy and Woolf utilise narrative voice to give the reader insight into how their female protagonists cope with mental struggles, however Woolf is arguably able to delve deeper due to her use of stream of consciousness style with the

objective of exploring the psychology of her characters. 'Mrs Dalloway' is a novel written with the purpose of innovation and exploration, as Woolf felt that the traditional linear storytelling of the Victorian era would not accurately represent the mindset of post-war Britain. Thus the novel's very intention allows the reader a more explicit depiction of characters coping with mental struggles.

AO3

In the main, contextual significance was successfully addressed with most candidates referencing relevant contextual links to some degree.

Level 4 and 5 responses demonstrated an integrated use of contextual influence to further deepen their argument within and across both texts.

Centres should continue to guide candidates that it is best to refrain from adding large sections of contextual detail at the beginning or ending of essays, with no discernible links to a wider argument. Likewise, centres are advised to explore with candidates how the cultural aspects of the texts' content, character and theme are influenced by the period of writing as there were some tenuous links to historical events, often 'shoe-horned' into the argument. It would also be advisable for centres to consider addressing literary context, as this affords students a clear opportunity for their points to also encompass AO2 and AO4.

The following extracts from a response to question 8 and question 11 highlight the candidates' careful consideration of context, and how this is linked both to the question and to the writer's craft. Note also how the contextual references are succinct with the candidate avoiding any lengthy digressions:

Shelley makes excellent use of setting to describe how Captain Walton overreached his ambitions and abilities resulting in a state of isolation. For instance, in his fourth letter to his sister, Walton describes the 'vast and irregular plains of ice which seemed to have no end'. Shelley's use of hyperbole and imagery of the sublime shows the extent to which Walton is dwarfed by his surroundings and feels alone, 'I have no friend'. Shelley is writing at a time when a ship under the command of Captain Bering sank in a similar attempt to explore the Arctic. Thus Shelley would have been well-acquainted with the impacts of society taking ambition too far.

The images of death conjured here are poignant since the menopause was often seen as a 'little death' for women in the 1920s society and they also emphasise Clarissa's sense of sexual death in her platonic marriage to Richard.

AO4

Where candidates achieved higher-level marks, they used introductions to state from the outset that they would be drawing upon meaningful and adroitly integrated connections that aided their argument. The links between texts were thoughtful and wide-ranging, (themes, character motivations, style, narrative methods and context), and sustained throughout the response.

Candidates who attained lower-level marks tended to treat the texts separately with only superficial connectives to link them.

Below is a good example of integrated linking from a response to question 9:

Furthermore Lucy and Sibyl are also likened to children to develop the idea that they are vulnerable victims. Lucy is constantly referred to as 'little girl' by the men around her and her dialogue 'dreams of love and kisses' is very child-like and idealistic. In the same way, Sibyl is a 'young girl' and nicknames Dorian 'Prince Charming' which highlights her naivety and childish state of mind. The fact that these two characters are both female and compared to children makes their downfall all the more horrific and tragic as it subverts the idea of protecting two of the most vulnerable sectors of society – women and children.

Finally, it was pleasing to note that many centres have taken advice from previous reports regarding **AO5**. This Assessment Objective is not rewarded for this component and in comparison to previous years, many avoided including and discussing critical interpretations of their chosen texts.

Question 1

This question asked about the presentation of female power.

There were very few responses to this question with only *Hard Times* and *The Color Purple* being the sole combination of texts for this question. Candidates appeared to be more confident in writing about *The Color Purple*, for example when considering Walker's use of the epistolary form. Less assured responses tended to provide a narrative overview of how female power was presented. Whilst a number of candidates focused on the powerlessness of women, better responses considered how female characters were able to develop power, and the impact it had on their own lives and that of other characters, particularly the men. There were also some interesting observations on how her relationship with Shug enabled Celie to become a stronger character.

Question 2

No responses to this question.

Question 3

This question asked about relationships between colonised people and their colonisers.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn was the only text not to have been chosen by candidates. Although only a small number of candidates wrote about this theme, on the whole this question was answered well. There were some notable responses that saw candidates comparing the ways writers used language to represent the colonised and colonisers, and the environments the characters found themselves in. There was also some effective consideration of the mutual lack of understanding between cultures. Recent coverage of the 'Windrush Generation' in the media has aided candidates in their accounts of how the experiences of this group were being explored in *The Lonely Londoners*.

Question 4

Limited responses to this question.

Question 5

Limited responses to this question.

Question 6

Limited responses to this question.

Question 7

This question asked about the impact of science on personal beliefs.

All of the texts were answered on; however, *The War of the Worlds* was significantly less popular. *Frankenstein* and *The Handmaid's Tale* was the most common pairing of texts. This was a popular choice of question and elicited a good range of answers. Candidates were able to develop clear and often sustained arguments, linking the texts together by comparing and contrasting a range of impacts on personal beliefs including religious faith, personal identity, scientific advancement and moral values. There was a number of responses that focused just on the 'science' element of the question and neglected how science impacted on personal beliefs.

Many candidates were able to comment on the writers' use of narrative technique with more assured responses considering in some detail how narrative choices enabled readers to gain a fuller understanding of characters' personal beliefs and the extent to which they had been impacted, for example through the multiple voices and framed narrative of *Frankenstein*. Also, candidates attaining Levels 4 and 5 considered the complexities of the question focus in relation to wider contexts such as theocracy in *The Handmaid's Tale* and Darwinist ideas in *War of the Worlds*. Candidates would be advised to ensure they address broader coverage of the texts as on occasions, textual references were taken from only a few sections of the texts.

Question 8

This question focused on conflicting ideas about society.

Frankenstein and *The Handmaid's Tale* was the most common pairing of texts. This was another popular question that facilitated responses across the levels, with a wide variety of marks awarded. Some candidates experienced some difficulty in constructing an argument and presented an overview of a range of ideas instead. Subsequently, this made it harder to link texts together. There was either limited or very general contextual knowledge demonstrated, typically brief references to Dolly the sheep for *Never Let Me Go* and Galvanism for *Frankenstein*.

More assured responses saw candidates exploring moral conflict for example in *Never Let Me Go*, the belief in the need to make more organs available against the need to hide the process that makes organ donation possible, and the conflicting attitudes to the roles of women in society in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Some candidate responses also thought through the extent to which any of these conflicts were resolved.

Question 9

This question asked about the presentation of female characters as victims.

All of the texts were answered, with *Dracula* and *The Little Stranger* being the most common pairing of texts.

A number of candidates retold the narrative and provided an overview of the female characters as feeble and in need of protection. There was often general contextual observations about the gothic genre and patriarchy and a lack of focus on the presentation of the theme and the writers' methods, resulting in lower AO2 marks.

More advanced responses explored how female characters, such as Caroline, were able to break out of the role of victim and the comparison of attitudes to women. Additionally, there was some exploration of how writers used methods such as narrative structure to present female characters, for example the unreliable first-person narrative of Dr Farraday.

Question 10

This question asked about the breaking of boundaries.

Although significantly less popular than question 9, all of the texts were answered, with *Dracula* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* being the most common pairing of texts.

Less successful responses saw candidates circling around the ideas of breaking boundaries, often listing examples without drawing upon a specific argument. The Assessment Objectives were addressed in a very general manner. In terms of AO3, some candidates put forward various unsupported statements, for instance about Stoker's sexuality; contextual references should be relevant and supported.

Better responses were able to explore the question focus by considering a range of boundaries that were broken, for example moral, gender and sexual boundaries and the implications of such boundaries being broken. There was significant exemplification such as the sexual behaviour of the female vampires and occasional focus on the femininity of men such as Harker. Some interesting comments on madness afforded neat contextual links to social attitudes towards madness, for example the Roderick's mental breakdown in *The Little Stranger*.

Question 11

This question asked about women's experiences of marriage.

All of the texts were considered.

Being a key theme across all the texts, a large number of candidates found a good range of approaches to the question, encompassing gender, expectations and disappointments and societal pressure. Candidates seemed to be more

secure in structuring an argument around such aspects of marriage and were able to provide cohesive, and at times sophisticated, responses. Students who had studied *Mrs Dalloway* wrote some very impressive answers; even those candidates whose understanding of writers' methods was weaker were still able to make relevant points for these texts.

There was a tendency for some candidates to focus on the most common sections of the novels, such as the opening of *Mrs Dalloway* with Clarissa buying flowers and the eating of the pebbles in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Addressing the wider scope of the novels should be encouraged as candidates should possess the confidence to express individual responses to the texts rather than a reliance on learnt analysis /viewpoints.

Question 12

This question asked about characters coping with mental struggles.

All of the texts were considered.

Candidates performing at Levels 2 and 3 seemed able to meet the Assessment Objectives solidly and avoid a drift into narrative.

Better responses also considered the characters who were trying to support those with mental struggles, notably Lucrezia, and those supposedly tasked with helping yet causing greater harm, such as Holmes and Bradshaw.

Regarding the writers' craft, the texts for this theme offered more obvious opportunities to highlight structural features, such as the use of the semi-colon by Woolf and access to different narrative perspectives.

