

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2012

International GCSE and
The Edexcel Certificate
English Literature (4ET0 and KET0)
Paper 2

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General Overview

This English Literature examination successfully enabled a range of candidates to show their knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the poems in the Poetry Anthology they have studied, but also met the requirements of Ofqual in examining how successfully candidates are able to respond to an unseen text, from a choice of either poetry or prose.

The candidates were expected to make two responses, in 90 minutes, on one unseen text, either poetry or prose, and on two poems from the Anthology booklet.

This was the first year that centres had experienced the revised format, including an unseen prose text and a longer examination, however time management was not an issue.

Candidate Choices

Candidates were required to answer one question from Section A and one question from Section B; each section provided a choice of two questions.

Section A

Many candidates chose to answer Question 1, on the unseen poem, *Blessing*, by Imtiaz Dharker. The majority of responses were of a high standard and clearly showed evidence of a secure understanding of poetic techniques and devices, as well as the ability to apply this understanding in an independent manner. Question 2, the unseen prose, *The Life of Pi*, by Yann Martel, was not as popular; however, this was not a surprise as this represented a change to the examination paper that candidates and teachers would have been used to previously. Some candidates referred to the extract as a poem, commenting on the writer's use of stanzas and rhyme.

Section B

Many candidates chose to answer Question 4, which required the candidates to show how the relationship between parent and child is represented in *Poem at Thirty-Nine* and one other poem of choice. A popular choice for the additional poem was *A Mother in a refugee camp*; the most successful responses were of a high standard and poor responses were rare.

Question 3, which required the candidates to explore the presentation of relationships in *Sonnet 116* and *My Last Duchess*, was not as popular as Question 4. The most successful responses were of a high standard.

Section A: Unseen Poem and Unseen Prose

Question 1 - *Blessing*

The poem *Blessing*, by Imtiaz Dharker, was chosen for Section A, as it provides many opportunities for exploration and discussion; it was felt that although the interpretation of the poem was limited, the title, the structure and the characterisation of the poem were effectively crafted to such an extent that candidates would be able to respond to a variety of areas. The poem was considered to be accessible on different levels.

It was the intention that the candidates achieving the lower levels would be able to access the idea of people being poor or of the idea of a hot country, whilst the candidates achieving the middle and higher levels would be able to start uncovering some of the metaphorical devices and be able to read deeply into the emotions of the characters and be able to sympathise and perhaps even feel remorseful at the materialistic values of the west.

It was hoped that the higher level candidates would also be able to focus on the title of the poem and discuss how this relates to the content of the poem from a symbolic perspective, whilst also reflecting on how western experiences of wealth are in stark contrast to the event depicted within the text.

- The most successful responses were able to give a critical response to the content, language and themes of the poem; in particular they were able to discuss the significance of the title in terms of symbolism.
- The least successful responses, whilst able to identify that there was poverty within the poem, were unable to provide a critical commentary or analysis of the theme and choice of language; on occasion some candidates misinterpreted the content – discussing the use of drug dealing or prostitution – responses of this nature were thankfully few and far between.
- In terms of language analysis, the most successful responses from candidates were able to identify the different types of linguistic and figurative device such as caesura, metaphor, simile, enjambment etc AND were able to discuss why the poet had chosen these devices, giving a personal response as to the effect that was required; only a few high level answers were able to comment on the degrees of success that resulted in these devices being utilised.
- The least successful responses tended to provide a narrative account of the events within the poem and / or commented on the warmth of the sun.

Exemplars:

Theme of Poverty

Blessing displays the importance of water. It writes of the implications of the lack of it and the appreciation of it in less developed areas of the world.

Writer's Craft

Dharker emphasises the importance of religion further by referring to the sound of water splashing as 'the voice of a kindly god.' This makes the sound of splashing water seem like a rarity that only the chosen few are fortunate enough to hear, just as only the chosen prophets are fortunate enough to see a God.

Originality of Interpretation

The high value of water is further displayed by the metaphor of water being 'silver'. There is much mention of metals in the poem, some examples being 'tin', 'brass' and 'aluminium'. The obvious difference between these common metals that all people have and the high value and appreciation of 'silver' water, reflects that water is scarce and is a rare and valued resource.

Structural Analysis

Within the paragraphs, the long sentences are broken by caesura: 'butts in, with pots, brass, copper'. This fractured and jagged syntax implies the frantic desperation of the villagers for water and the variety of implements used to collect it.

Reflective Personal Response

To conclude, Dharker creates an image for the reader of water as a gift of life and a rare luxury that one should take as much advantage of whenever they can as it is 'sometimes' a 'rush of fortune' that one should take with 'frantic hands'.

Question 2 – *The Life of Pi*

The prose piece, *The Life of Pi*, by Yann Martel was chosen for section A, as it provides many opportunities for exploration and discussion; it was felt that the extract chosen was accessible to all candidates, due to its simple language; however, the use of figurative language would also allow higher ability candidates to be stretched, thus allowing for accessibility on all levels.

It was the intention that the candidates achieving the lower levels would be able to identify the setting and be able to comment on the use of colour to describe

the flora and fauna, whilst the candidates achieving the middle and higher levels would be able to comment on the changing perspectives of the narrator as he matures.

It was hoped that the higher level candidates would also be able to focus on the contrasts between humans and animals and be able to pick up on the irony of the animals of the zoo looking down on the visitors, as well as picking up on discriminating language choices and the effects created.

- The most successful responses were able to give a critical response to the content, language and description of the environment explored within the text; in particular they were able to discuss the changing perspective of the narrator, from childhood to adulthood.
- The least successful responses whilst able to identify that the setting was in a zoo, were unable to show understanding of childhood and adult perspectives; on occasion candidates instead discussed the perceived cruelty of keeping animals in zoos or discussed how wonderful it must be to visit a zoo with a train – thus missing the use of crafting by the writer to describe the changing perceptions of the zoo.
- In terms of language analysis, the most successful responses from candidates were able to comment on the variety of language choices made by the writer to create an evocative description of the zoo; they were able to discuss the vibrancy of the environment and acknowledged that this was made possible through distinct language choices for effect.
- The least successful responses from candidates answering this question, tended to discuss the extract as if it were a poem, commenting on stanza length and figurative devices; on occasion some candidates, in misreading the text type, commented on the use of enjambment in every line.

Exemplars:

Descriptions of the Surroundings

He uses rich imagery and metaphor to convey the beauty of the zoo to the reader, such as the 'riot of flowers is incessant'; meaning that their 'bright colours' are everywhere, just like the trees 'in profusion'. By listing the various types of exotic trees and plants to be found in 'Pondicherry Botanical Garden', the reader gains an image of a chaos of greenery and mystery, only ordered by 'neat labels at their feet'.

Writer's Craft

The writer deliberately juxtaposes the idyllic calm human nature of the zoo with its primeval animal qualities, in order to show the wide range of tastes the zoo caters for; implying that whatever the reader's attitudes towards the place, there is always more to be explored and described in order to entertain.

Originality of Interpretation

The colloquial phrasing of 'What can you expect...?' gives the impression of Pi as a friendly tour guide, who explores the zoo in his head.

Structural Analysis

The writer also comically combines the concrete with the abstract when describing the size of the zoo. Although physically it was 'spread over numberless acres' and was 'big enough to require a train to explore it', as he grows older and, therefore, larger; 'it seemed to get smaller'.

Reflective Personal Response

The narrator uses imagery as his main form of descriptive technique, allowing him to juxtapose different qualities of the zoo. The tone of his language varies to show this juxtaposition, whilst his use and manipulation of syntax, urges the reader to explore further.

Question 3 – Sonnet 113 and My Last Duchess

Question 3 asked candidates to explore *Sonnet 113* and *My Last Duchess*, from the anthology, in order to discuss how relationships are shown by the poets. These poems were chosen in contrast to the focus on environment in the Section A, Unseen Texts, but were also chosen as they show contrasting views – Shakespeare describing true love and Browning describing love in terms of material gain.

It was an expectation that all candidates would have studied these poems and would, therefore, be able to discuss each poem in detail.

Candidates achieving the lower levels were expected to know each of the poems and, therefore, make some comments on each. However, at this level, it was understood that candidates might not refer to the relationships, but would at least be able to see that one poem was positive and one not so.

Candidates achieving the middle two levels were expected to know the poems in more detail, with level two candidates responding in a narrative manner, showing their understanding of the poems.

However, once into Level three, candidates were expected to be clearly discussing how differing ideas of relationships are shown in each poem, giving specific textual references as evidence. It was hoped that whilst in Level three, candidates would be starting to find contrasts and comparisons between the two poems in order to further evidence their observations in relation to the question; however, it must be emphasised that the full range of marks can be achieved without comparisons being drawn between the two poems. Comparison is not a requirement.

Candidates achieving the highest level were expected to be using integrated quotations in their writing and to be automatically finding connections between the techniques used by the writer to present ideas, themes and/or settings in each poem. This was most effective when two poems were compared in one paragraph, although not a requirement. It was also an expectation that candidates would comment on the effectiveness of the poems and how they appropriately met the requirements of the question, utilising a detailed and analytical personal response.

- The most successful responses were able to give a critical response to the content, language and themes of the poems; in particular they were able to compare the ideas expressed and give a personal response to this. (Again, please note, the full range of marks can be achieved without any comparisons of the two poems being made.)
- The least successful responses surprisingly did not seem to know anything of the content of the poems – in some cases, for example, suggesting that the Duchess was having an affair with the painter or that Shakespeare was exploring all the reasons why he is against marriage. Candidates here also tended to provide a narrative account of the events within the poems and / or commented that these poems were about two different types of love stories.
- In terms of language analysis, the most successful responses from candidates were able to identify the different types of linguistic and figurative device such as caesura, metaphor, simile, enjambment etc AND were able to discuss why the poets had chosen these devices, giving a personal response as to the effect that was required; only a few high level answers were able to comment on the degrees of success that resulted in these devices being utilised.

- Where candidates were least successful in their responses, devices were either identified without explanation or were not even identified at all.

Exemplars

Theme of Relationships

Both poems have many differences in the way a relationship should be. Firstly in 'Sonnet 116', the poet describes love as something that does not change for any reason, 'love is not love which alters when alteration finds', unlike in 'My Last Duchess' which has a negative view of relationships and portrays love as one sided.

Writer's Craft

The poet says that love is the guide to everyone and will lead them to safety by using nautical imagery; 'It is the star to every wandering bark...' – this shows that love is the beacon of hope to those who are lost, as if at sea.

Originality of Interpretation

'My Last Duchess' is described as one-sided, whereby the Duke did not see the Duchess as an equal but more of an object as a result of the Duke appearing to be misogynistic.

Structural Analysis

In 'My Last Duchess' love is seen as cyclical to the Duke as at the end of the poem, the reader learns that the Duke is preparing for his next Duchess; 'Of mine for dowry...'

Reflective Personal Response

Overall 'Sonnet 116' has a positive view on relationships and love and it is described as everything that it should be; the poet has so much confidence in this fact that in the last rhyming couplet he says 'If this be error and upon me proved, I never writ nor no man ever loved' – this paradoxical conceit emphasises the poet's confidence in what love should be."

Question 4 – Poem at Thirty-Nine and one other poem of choice

Question 4 asked candidates to explore *Poem at Thirty-Nine* and one other poem from the Anthology, which showed the relationship between parent and child. Candidates were permitted to choose any additional poem from the Anthology, but the expectation was that they would find one which focussed on the relationship shown between parent and child.

It was an expectation that all candidates would have studied these poems and would, therefore, be able to discuss each poem in detail.

Candidates achieving the lower levels were expected to know each of the poems and, therefore, make some comments on each. However, at this level it was understood that candidates might not refer to the relationship shown between parent and child, but would at least be able to make a relevant comment on each of the poems and that the poems chosen would link together thematically, even if this was not expressed by the candidate.

Candidates achieving the middle two levels were expected to know the poems in more detail, with level two candidates responding in a narrative manner, showing their understanding of both poems.

However, once into level three, candidates were expected to be clearly discussing how the relationship between parent and child is shown in each poem, giving specific textual references as evidence. This can be handled individually or by comparison. It was hoped that whilst in level three, candidates would be starting to find contrasts and comparisons between the two poems in order to further evidence their observations in relation to the question; however, a full range of marks can be achieved if no comparisons have been made throughout the response, as this is not a requirement of the syllabus.

Candidates achieving the highest level were expected to be using integrated quotations in their writing. Often the most able candidates drew comparisons and contrasts across poems; this was most effective when two poems were compared in one paragraph. Also, many candidates gained full marks for handling the poems separately and for making perceptive points about how the writer of each poem presented their ideas or theme, without any direct comparisons being made.

It was also an expectation that candidates would give reasons for their choice of poem and how it appropriately met the requirements of the question, utilising a detailed and analytical personal response. Whilst this was not explicitly expressed for the majority of responses, candidates were able to provide an original response when unpicking the content and themes of both poems.

Pairings chosen were as follows (In order of popularity):

Poem at thirty-nine with A Mother in a refugee camp

Poem at thirty-nine with If

Poem at thirty-nine with Piano

Poem at thirty-nine with Once Upon a Time

- The most successful responses were able to give a critical response to the content, language and themes of each poem and specifically referred to the essay question posed.
- The least successful responses tended to make one observation for each poem and then repeat this at various points in the essay, resulting in a limited awareness of each.
- In terms of language analysis, the most successful responses from candidates were able to identify the different types of linguistic and figurative device such as caesura, metaphor, simile, enjambment etc AND were able to discuss why the poet had chosen these devices, giving a personal response as to the effect that was required; only a few high level answers were able to comment on the degrees of success that resulted in these devices being utilised.
- The least successful responses from candidates answering this question, tended not to identify any linguistic and / or figurative devices, instead relying on paraphrasing in retelling the narrative

Exemplars:

Theme of Parent and Child

In 'Poem at Thirty-Nine', Walker's love, appreciation and respect for her dad is displayed, similarly, 'Mother in a Refugee Camp' also explores the theme of love between a parent and child, however through the representation of a mother and her dying child.

Writer's Craft

There is a contemplative and reflective tone employed by Walker, as she writes of how she 'think[s] of him' and how 'many of [her] truths must have grieved him.' Furthermore the constant repetition of the word 'I' displays how personal her sentiments are.

Originality of Interpretation

The biblical reference of the 'Madonna and child' directly establishes the magnitude of the mother's love, which is further accentuated by the fact that 'she would soon have to forget him'.

Structural Analysis

The loose structure of 'Poem at Thirty-Nine', with no set rhyme or stanza structure, reflects the teachings of her father which were 'seasoning none of [her] life twice', thus not being restricted by

any conformity and instead being able to add flavour and excitement to life.

Reflective Personal Response

In conclusion, both poets present the relationship between parent and child as one where the actions of each have a strong impact; Achebe presents the strength of maternal love through the actions of a mother, similarly Walker presents the power of paternal love through the memorable actions of the father which impacted on the poet's life.

General Quality of Written Communication

- Responses in the top two levels were eloquent, fresh and easy to read. The quality of written communication here was high, with accurate spelling and advanced vocabulary. Responses here often discussed the texts in a highly complex and critical manner, which highlighted a mature level of understanding and analysis
- Responses in the middle two levels were often able to give a personal response to the texts and were able to relate this personal response to the questions posed. The quality of written communication was generally of a good standard, with generally accurate spelling and occasional use of advanced vocabulary. Responses were clearly written and appropriate quotations were chosen to support their ideas
- Essays in the lower level were not able to give a personal response to the poems and found it difficult to steer away from a narrative approach. The quality of written communication was sometimes limited, with simple sentences employed and lapses in accuracy of spelling.

Grade Boundaries

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