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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel IAL

In English Literature (WET01)

Unit 1: Post-2000 Poetry and Prose

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Introduction

WET01 Post-2000 Poetry and Prose requires candidates to apply their knowledge of literary techniques and features, to produce crafted, analytical answers that are informed by the capacity to make connections between poems, demonstrate how meanings are shaped in poetic and prose texts and explore a variety of contextual factors that shape the production and reception of contemporary prose.

There are two sections to the paper, each carrying 25 marks. Section A: Post-2000 Poetry requires the analysis of two poems from a studied anthology- one poem is 'named' and one selected by the candidate. Section B requires the analysis of a novel from the post-2000 period. In Section B, there are 5 texts to choose from, and candidates select one of two questions on their chosen novel. The personal response of the candidate to the Section A poetry question is expected to be supplemented by an ability to analyse and evaluate connections between texts (AO4). The response to the Section B question requires that the candidate demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant contextual details (AO3). Contextual factors might include biographical details related to the author and historical/political issues relevant to the geographical or time setting of the text.

Overall, many of the responses produced by the candidates demonstrated good ability to make apt and sophisticated connections between the poems in Section A and a sound understanding of the themes and ideas present in the novels in Section B. The percentage of A grade work produced in this series was lower than in the last series and potential reasons for this decrease will be addressed in the following report. Generally, the Section A responses were less secure in their capacity to demonstrate understanding of how meanings are shaped in poetic texts (AO2). In Section B, a general area of weakness was the lack of discriminating analysis of contextual factors in the novel of study (AO3).

The questions set were clear and offered the candidates ample opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and understanding. High-scoring candidates satisfied the relevant assessment objectives consistently across both responses. Lower grade answers were marked by a less secure capacity to address the relevant assessment objectives and a tendency to produce imbalanced responses, with long answers on one question and brief responses on the other. It is suggested that centres spend as much time as possible on timed exam practice in order to alleviate this area of weakness.

In Section A, the majority of candidates responded to Question 1 which required the exploration of the idea of getting older while comparing Dunmore's *To My Nine-Year-Old Self* with one other poem. A smaller number of candidates attempted Question 2, and explored how people encountered different countries and cultures while comparing Tishani Doshi's *The Deliverer* with a poem of their choice. In Section B, candidates responded mainly to questions 3 and 4 on *The Kite Runner*. The next most popular text was *Life of Pi*. The remaining texts- *The White Tiger*, *Brooklyn* and *Purple Hibiscus*-elicited very few responses.

Section A - Post-2000 Poetry

Question 1

As mentioned earlier in this report, this was the most popular of the two questions on the poetry anthology. Most candidates grasped the meaning of the question and tackled the theme of "getting older" with enthusiasm. The majority of candidates used Barber's *Material* to compare with Dunmore's *To My Nine-Year-Old Self*. A number of candidates used Boyle's *A Leisure Centre Is Also A Temple of Learning* as their comparative poem. Both poems proved to be good choices and candidates found rich points of comparison that enabled them to develop confident responses. Less assured responses chose less apt poems, demonstrating the importance of making good choices when selecting poems to use in responding to the question.

Question 2

Candidates who chose this question were generally less secure in their capacity to analyse Doshi's *The Deliverer* and to develop confident responses to the theme of encountering different countries and cultures. In weaker responses, the shift in perspective in the poem was sometimes misunderstood and the literary effects and blunt vocabulary were not explored with sufficient depth.

In general, lower-scoring responses on the poetry questions paid insufficient attention to the way language shapes meaning, focussing instead on generalised discussion of the themes. Even the more confident candidates would have accessed higher marks with more rigorous analysis of language, imagery and other poetic techniques.

Section B - Post-2000 Prose

The Kite Runner

Question 3

This was the most popular choice of question in Section B, and the majority of candidates displayed enthusiasm as well as knowledge in exploring the relationship between younger and older generations in the novel. The different relationships presented in the novel were explored confidently by almost all. However, weaker candidates tended toward narrative/description without analysing the changing nature of these relationships under the tension of war and migration. Stronger responses analysed a set of relationships beyond Amir's relationship with his father and used knowledge of political issues and cultural mores to provide a contextual framework to aid their discussion. Less assured responses were narrative in nature and less confident in integrating contexts. These types of essays generally included context as part of an introduction or as single paragraphs within the response.

Question 4

The issue of bullying in *The Kite Runner* elicited some sensitive and thoughtful responses with a number of candidates making the connection between “bullying” on the personal level and aggression and violent coercion on the political stage. Interestingly, some candidates used the question to explore gender relations and integrated context on this issue in a perceptive fashion. Less assured responses were narrowly focussed on the relationship between Amir and Hassan and did not widen the approach to other characters and macro issues. Context was again addressed inconsistently and some candidates made general points regarding oppression and did not analyse religious, tribal or gender discrimination with sufficient depth.

In general, in the case of both questions on *The Kite Runner*, there was a tendency on the part of less confident responses to describe and narrate rather than analyse. Further, there was a lack of sufficient focus on the part of many candidates on the writer’s craft. For example, the narrative technique employed in the text was often overlooked.

Life of Pi

Question 5

Most candidates writing on *Life of Pi* chose this question and explored how the protagonist’s experiences transformed him. More advanced responses used the opportunities offered by the question to integrate context with skill and knowledge. For example, Pi’s early years in Pondicherry afforded adept candidates the chance to explore India’s political situation and sophisticated responses integrated interesting contextual remarks on religion and philosophy. Stronger candidates explored how Pi’s ecumenical outlook was forged in Pondicherry. The question led some candidates to list or describe “experiences” without analysing their importance and their relationship to Pi’s transformation. Further, Pi’s experiences in his father’s zoo were often neglected. The less assured candidates had the tendency to narrate events such as the sinking of the ship or the experience on the lifeboat.

Question 6

The question on symbolism in *Life of Pi* generated some interesting responses as candidates integrated knowledge of the text with insight into the use of literary devices. Some more advanced responses tested the grounds of the question by assessing the extent to which the novel is over reliant on symbolism at the expense of the development of plot or character. A small number of candidates identified more abstruse, underlying symbols, while the more obvious examples of symbolism present in the text were identified by the majority of candidates and Martel’s method of linking them to meaning and themes were reasonably well articulated. However, responses to this question did not demonstrate sufficient capability to integrate contextual discussion and there was an absence of higher level evaluation of the use of symbolism in the text.

In general, candidates writing on *Life of Pi* demonstrated admirable knowledge of the text and an appreciation of Martel's ambitious attempt to explore ideas in the novel. More capability to explore narrative technique in *Life of Pi* would have extended the candidates' capacity to discuss both questions.

The White Tiger

Question 7

There were a very small number of responses on *The White Tiger*. As a consequence, it is difficult to identify patterns in the way candidates explored the questions. Question 7 allowed the candidates to write about the presentation of character in the novel and responses were to an extent perceptive and informed. However, the concept of "exaggerated caricature" as opposed to "properly developed character" was not fully explored; most candidates missed the opportunity to delineate the distinction between types of character. Further, contextual issues were under analysed. The question seems to have not offered the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge of India's politico-historical development.

Question 8

The question on Balram's point of view elicited a small number of responses. The protagonist's vituperative, caustic voice was not understood fully. However, the responses marked demonstrated knowledge of the text and an understanding of the implicit critique of neo-liberalism and globalism embedded in the novel.

Brooklyn

Question 9 and Question 10

There were a very small number of responses to *Brooklyn*. The few candidates who wrote either on the theme of secrecy (Q9) or making decisions (Q10) demonstrated sound knowledge of the texture and content of the novel. More focus on the narrative technique employed by Toibin would have been beneficial. Responses to both questions required more exploration of the novel's use of dialogue, spare descriptive style and utilization of a semi-omniscient third person perspective.

Purple Hibiscus

Question 10 and 11

There was just one or two responses on *Purple Hibiscus*. The candidates demonstrated sound knowledge of the text and of the Nigerian setting.

Paper Summary

Based on performance on this paper, future candidates are offered the following advice:

Post-2000 Poetry

- Use a range of literary terminology to identify ways in which poets create meaning; discuss the effect of these techniques on the reader. Focus on the key aspects of poetic technique: form, structure, imagery, diction etc.
- Select the poem to compare with the named poem with care. Remember that you will need to identify points of comparison and contrast and make connections between the poems, so apt selection is very important.
- Read the exact wording of the question carefully and answer this question, rather than one you practised before the exam.
- Try to communicate your enthusiasm for the poems you have studied.

Post-2000 Prose

- Use a range of literary terminology to identify ways in which novelists create meaning; discuss the effect of these techniques on the reader. Focus on the key aspects of prose technique: perspective, narrative structure, vocabulary, imagery, etc.
- Explore contextual factors in a way that informs your response to the novel and to the question. Integrate the context throughout your writing and try to avoid merely including this knowledge as introductory material or to form a conclusion.
- Read the question carefully and ensure that you focus in your response on the exact wording of the question. Try to develop a response that explores the question in a critically engaged style.
- Try to communicate your enthusiasm for the novel you have studied.