



Pearson

Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2018

Pearson Edexcel IAL
In English Literature (WET03)
Unit 3: Poetry and Prose

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Introduction

Centres are thanked for choosing Pearson Edexcel for their International A-Level English Literature provider.

For this unit, WET03, the open book examination is 2 hours long and there are two sections.

For Section A, Unseen Poetry, students will use the reading skills they have developed throughout the course. Students will answer one essay question on a post-1900 unseen poem that is printed in a separate Source Insert.

For Section B, Prose, students answer one comparative essay question from a choice of two, based on the two studied prose texts from their chosen theme. Students can select from the themes: *Growing Up*, *Colonisation and After*, *Science and Society* or *Women and Society*.

Student responses will be informed by an appreciation of the contexts in which texts are written and read. Students should be encouraged to view the texts in relation to each other.

In Section B, Prose, students will study two (from three) thematically linked texts and 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 20 marks available for Section A and 30 for Section B. The total mark of 50 represents 25% of the total IA2.

Section A, Unseen Poetry, assesses Assessment Objectives AO1 and AO2.

Section B, Prose, assesses Assessment Objectives AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO4. AO5 is *not* assessed in this paper.

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

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General Overview of the WET03 1701 paper and performance

This has been a successful paper, even though it has been an atypical series with a small entry. There was an increase in entries this year compared with 2017.

There were no errors and no changes made to the mark scheme. The standard of responses was much better than those seen in the 1701 series, but there was little evidence of Level 5 marks being awarded, particularly for Section A; however, some very positive outcomes were seen. We hope that both candidates and centres are delighted with their results.

Section A: Post-1900 Unseen Poetry

Question 1

The Unseen Poem for Question 1 was *A Day on the River* by Vernon Scannell. This was an accessible poem and some candidates were able to explore the poem for metaphorical interpretations while others provided a surface reading. Often, valid points were made, but these ideas sometimes lacked development. There were some candidates who explored the changing nature of the river and how this could relate to life or human relationships. There was one response that explored the significance of the reference to '*the Ark*' in some detail, commenting on how dangerous the river could be and how nature is more powerful. The candidate then linked this to Man's destruction of the environment. Ideas were valid and successfully and convincingly presented.

Other candidates commented on the narrative tone and atmosphere of the poem and valid comments were made about the river not being as secure as it once seemed. There was some exploration of the relationship between the river and humans and that between humans and dogs. Some commented on how the river was dangerous and ever changing, linking this to the dog imagery and how both 'could bite'. A wide range of terminology was employed by some candidates, including the less used 'dysphemism' when exploring how the 'sun began to bleed'. Ideas were mostly supported with relevant textual references, but greater use of examples and closer analysis at word-level would benefit some candidates, although candidates should avoid simply feature spotting.

Some responses were not as fluent as expected at this level. Candidates are required to communicate fluently, accurately and effectively their knowledge, understanding and critical evaluation of texts.

There were some responses where candidates did not develop their ideas in enough detail and in many cases more exploration and examples would have benefited the candidates.

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.

As mentioned in previous reports, it is recommended that centres look carefully at the *Sample Assessment Materials* and the mark scheme for this paper in order to become familiar with the assessment requirements. The mark grids demonstrate how candidates can progress from one level to the next. For Level 4 and above, responses need to be discriminating, critical and evaluative. Close analysis should be controlled and candidates should be able to identify and provide examples of the nuances and subtleties of the writer's craft.

Centres are reminded that context is not assessed in Section A of the paper.

Section B: Prose

In the prose section, the most popular choices of set texts were *Science and Society* (Questions 6 and 7) and *Women and Society* (Questions 8 and 9). The least popular collection was *Colonisation and After*. A number of candidates gained marks in Level 3 or above, although at times they did not cover all assessment objectives. There were some candidates who did not consider context and others who did not consider the writers' craft and the language, structure and form of the texts. Comparison is more evident in responses, but is still an area that can be improved up on.

A few candidates demonstrated a surface understanding of their two chosen texts, but responses were often too brief, not detailed enough, took a narrative approach or lacked comparison. Most candidates tended to make general points, but often there was little exploration of techniques or the writers' craft. In some rare instances, it was evident that the texts had not been studied in sufficient detail and depth. There was evidence of relying on film versions of texts, which of course can be unreliable and subject to inaccuracies; some film versions are very different from the original texts, but they can provide candidates with interesting and varied interpretations; however, they must demonstrate a secure understanding of the novels that they have studied.

Centres are advised to look at the mark grids for Section B. There are six bullet points in each level and are all reflective of the assessment objectives. The first bullet point in the mark grid relates to the literary techniques and use of terminology. The second bullet point focuses on the writer's craft. Contextual points (bullets three and four) and comparison between the two texts (bullets five and six) are essential elements of each level. If a candidate does not consider all of these, the mark awarded is normally placed lower in the appropriate level, unless a 'best fit' approach has been applied.

It is important to stress that when considering contextual factors, the response must not become a historical rather than literary essay. There was evidence this series where a candidate mainly commented on the historical background of the two texts, but there was very little exploration of the novels. Very few candidates considered aspects of language and often comment in relation to the writer's craft was either overlooked or implicit.

Questions 2 and 3

The set texts for the *Growing Up* collection are: *What Maisie Knew*, *Great Expectations* and *The Color Purple*. Question 2 focussed on the theme of friendship and Question 3 asked candidates to explore the passage of time.

The most popular pairing of texts was *Great Expectations* and *The Color Purple*. A number of candidates spent a little time on planning in order to focus their ideas and a range of points were made, which clearly was a benefit to them.

For Question 2, there were some interesting ideas, such as how friendship 'allows both protagonists to grow'. Other points included: Joe's 'nurturing' of Pip, Celie's isolation and relationship with Shug, female solidarity and Pip's relationship with Estella. Some considered the use of symbolism, but the focus on the question was lost. Other candidates listed a number of friendships, but the significance of these friendships was not explored.

For Question 3, some comparisons were made, but comment in relation to context was weak or implicit. One candidate compared *What Maisie Knew* and *Great Expectations*. The candidate discussed the 'evolution' of Pip and Maisie, how other characters are introduced as a plot device and how they are relevant to the protagonists' development over time. Ideas were relevant, but there was some imbalance, with little use of textual evidence in relation to *What Maisie Knew*.

Questions 4 and 5

The set texts for the *Colonisation and After* collection are: *Heart of Darkness*, *The Lonely Londoners* and *A Passage to India*. Question 4 asked candidates to consider how writers present a divided society. There were no responses to Question 5 and the use of settings.

Due to a very small entry, and being the least popular option this series, there was only one response to Question 4. Performance of the questions cannot be fully judged and, unfortunately, the one candidate provided a historical essay that included very few details in relation to the chosen texts, and these details were not always secure. The brevity of the response and lack of comparison hindered progress.

Questions 6 and 7

The set texts for the *Science and Society* collection are: *Never Let Me Go*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Frankenstein*.

Question 6 focussed on comparing the ways writers ask fundamental questions about the purpose of life, and Question 7 asked candidates to compare the ways writers use narrative voice.

Some responses generated much discussion. One candidate alluded to the writers (Atwood and Shelley) having particular views about the purpose of life. The ideas in the novels are not necessarily the authors' personal views, but are those of their societies and characters within the novels. For instance, it was suggested that Atwood's view is that the only purpose that women have in life is 'to listen and obey men'. Clearly, this is not Atwood's view, but what is presented in the novel and had the candidate referred to Gilead's views, this would have been more accurate. Despite this, many ideas were maturely expressed and a confident approach was adopted. Some interesting points were made, such as Frankenstein's purpose 'is to pioneer' and how Offred and others 'must remain in control of their own mind[s]'. There were some candidates who considered the role of education and religion in giving a purpose in life, but in some instances further elaboration or clarification was required. Contextual points were often integrated but not all assessment objectives were fully addressed.

For Question 7, those who compared the use of narrative voice in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Never Let Me Go* considered the Handmaids' feelings of suffocation being 'forbidden to speak', the use of unreliable narrators and how the narrative voice makes the reader feel 'pity and sympathy' for characters. Again, greater coverage, more examples, further development of ideas and close analysis of use of language would have benefited some responses.

Questions 8 and 9

The set texts for the *Women and Society* collection are: *Wuthering Heights*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *Beloved*.

Question 8 asked candidates to compare strong women in the two chosen novels and Question 9 focussed on social class.

Candidates who compared *Wuthering Heights* and *Beloved* tended to explore the emotional and physical strength of female characters, patriarchal societies and how women demonstrate their strength through their resilience. One candidate considered how Isabella (*Wuthering Heights*) demonstrated strength by presenting a convincing argument in relation to Isabella's strength in leaving Heathcliff, particularly when the time setting of the novel is taken into consideration. Others considered how Sethe demonstrated strength in committing infanticide, which is also a valid argument. There were some comments in relation to language (repetition and metaphor) and made points about how strength can be defeated. In

some rare instances, ideas had become repetitive and the focus on the question was lost.

For Question 9, candidates explored and compared social class in their two chosen texts. The most popular text choices were *Wuthering Heights* and *Beloved*. Comparisons were made within and between novels, such as the contrasting social classes of Edgar and Nelly and how Heathcliff rises in status in *Wuthering Heights*. Comparisons were drawn between the position of Sethe and Paul D with the white slave owners, both in financial and hierarchical terms. Some considered the white's 'dehumanising' effect on the slaves. There was comment in relation to Catherine's marriage to Edgar solely for social standing and how women were constrained by social expectations at the time. At times, there was a lack of close analysis and contextual points were sometimes implicit. More close analysis of the writer's craft and further exploration of language would have benefited some candidates.

Paper Summary

Based on the performance of this paper and previous series, centres and candidates are offered the following advice:

- focus on the assessment objectives and use mark schemes to guide teaching
- encourage candidates to use a range of literary terminology to identify ways in which writers create meaning; discuss the effect of these techniques have on the reader or audience, but avoid simply feature spotting. Incorporate language points throughout the response
- for Section B, ensure that candidates make comparisons and refer to context when writing about their two 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 the writer and the reader. Context should be integrated and linked to the ideas and points being made. Context should not be 'bolt-on'
- avoid narrative re-telling of the texts chosen for Section B. Narrative approaches are rarely successful.
- read the exact wording of the question carefully and answer this question, rather than one practised before the exam
- enjoy reading and writing and share enthusiasm with the examiner.

The following points have been included in previous reports, but are repeated here as a reminder of some general points when teaching the specification.

Guidance on A03

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.

The specification states that for Section B, students are required to:

- show knowledge and understanding of how genre features and conventions operate in prose fiction texts
- show knowledge and understanding of a range of ways to read texts, including reading for detail of how writers use and adapt language, form and structure in texts, responding critically and creatively
- show knowledge and understanding of a range of literary texts and make connections and explore the relationships between texts
- show knowledge and understanding of the contexts in which texts have been produced and received and understanding of how these contexts influence meaning
- identify and explore how attitudes and values are expressed in texts
- communicate fluently, accurately and effectively their knowledge, understanding and evaluation of texts
- use literary critical concepts and terminology with understanding and discrimination
- make appropriate use of the conventions of writing in literary studies, referring accurately and appropriately to texts and sources.

Thank you.

Principal Examiner
(IAL English Literature WET 03)
February 2018

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>