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Examiners' Report January 2011

GCE English Literature 6ET01 01

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Introduction

Timing was not a significant problem for most candidates, though there were those who found the demand of managing to complete all three tasks in the available period difficult.

All of the tasks set drew responses.

The quality of written expression and organisation was generally satisfactory or better.

The exam is divided into three sections, as already stated. What follows is a commentary on levels of performance in each of these components. There is also exemplification of student responses to two of the tasks.

Section A - Unseen Poetry and Prose

This part of the exam offers candidates a choice of response. Two unseen texts are set - one poem and one prose extract, followed by three short answer tasks. Candidates choose one or the other passage to answer on. The question is worth 20 marks and assesses AO1 (10 marks overall) and AO2 (10 marks overall).

Some candidates still write too much for Section A, despite the warnings of previous Reports and Training Packs.

Poetry

The poem set was Sonnet VI by Pablo Neruda. It was certainly accessible.

Question 1(a)

The instruction here was to write about “sound devices”. This task had been set in January 2009, so there was a precedent for it. What was intended was “write about alliteration, assonance, sibilance and so on.”. It was surprising to see so many responses which did not do this, opting instead for general remarks about words such as “whisper” and “cried”. This was likely to lead only to 1 or 2 marks out of 5. Where the starting point was specific technical comment, the general result tended to be 4 or 5 out of 5. Centres may wish to revisit this teaching point.

Question 1(b)

“Imagery” was a much less troubling concept it appeared. Responses tended to do well with identification and analysis, even when they were not specific about metaphor, for example. There was a lot of sound or better writing relating to “a cracked bell” and “a torn heart”.

Question 1(c)

Here too, most students had little difficulty in spotting that loss, childhood and memory could be regarded as themes of the poem. Credit was also given to intuitive and creative thinking leading to valid answers beyond the obvious examples and the indicative content outlined in the Mark Scheme. Discussion was often well supported by analysis of language and exemplification, though there remains some confusion about the distinction between “theme” and “motif” perhaps.

Question 2

The extract set was the opening of "The Inheritors" by William Golding.

Question 2(a)

Comments on language choices were often concise. Largely, good use of quotation was in evidence and there was a pleasing focus on specific items such as nouns, verbs and adjectives - "smacked" and "stabbed" were commonly chosen. There were occasional, often interesting discussions of the nomenclature of the Neanderthals.

Question 2(b)

The concepts of sentence structure and tense were not as well managed - though there was some excellent work on the variation in simple and complex structures, it was rare. This said, many students got on well with "Faster! Faster!" and "They saw." for instance, making straightforward but often astute comments on their effects and usually gaining 3 or 4 out of 5 in the process.

Question 2(c)

This response to 2c received full marks.

(c) Novelists often use tone and mood in order to create interest in their work. Using your knowledge of tone and mood, discuss the ways in which William Golding uses them in this passage.

(AO1 = 5, AO2 = 5)

At the beginning of this passage, the mood ^{and tone} ~~and tone~~ is light hearted and happy as the writer uses ~~the~~ language such as "laughing" and "grinning happily". Moreover, the excitement of the characters is captured in ~~the~~ cries such as "Faster! Faster!". The short sentences such as "Lok's feet were clever, They Saw." ~~create a~~ quicken the pace which again adds to a tone of excitement and the light hearted mood. However, the mood deteriorates as the passage progresses. Indeed, the writer uses imagery such as "the grin faded" and also the pace to show this deterioration. From "running as fast as he could" the writer moves on to "swerved and slowed" to a point where he eventually "stopped". The slowing of the pace reflects the deterioration of the ~~excitement~~ the characters feel. Indeed the

~~tone~~ ~~tone~~ now becomes there is now a repetition of ^{the word} "uncertainty" and indeed the tone becomes uncertain. He states "The log has gone away." in a sentence so short and simple it sounds as if it has been spoken by a young child. This conveys the surprise and confusion of the speaker which adds to the uncertain, ~~tone~~ confused tone. Moreover, the happy mood previously established disappears completely as the writer uses imagery of "horrible ~~water~~ water", "grey and rotting". Moreover, ~~he~~ in the last paragraph he uses extremely long sentences in comparison to the rest of the passage and this serves to add a certain drone to the passage which in turn affects the tone and removes the happiness from it. Finally, the writer ends with "the log was gone" which is a repetition and adds to the immediacy of ~~the~~ reality. This then completes the deterioration of the tone and mood of the passage serves to add a certain drone to the passage which in turn affects the tone and removes the happiness from it. Finally, the writer ends with "the log was gone" which is a repetition and adds to the immediacy of ~~the~~ reality. This then completes the deterioration of the tone and mood of the passage.


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Examiner Comments

The student notes the change in mood and tone effectively and supports this discussion with good exemplification. The use of specific terminology is also a positive feature.

Question 3(a)

Although the question asked students to consider “the ways in which home is presented in at least two poems”, it also added “in the light of (the) statement (about finding an ‘appropriate voice’)”. Candidates quite often attempted to answer on “voice” without ever using the term in their responses. Relevance was therefore a major issue. Centres might wish to think about the ways in which voice is created for future series, as well as reminding students to return often to the terms of the task. Further guidance could be had from the Mark Scheme.

Question 3(b)

Whilst fewer attempts were made on this task, there was a good range of response considering whether or not poets writing about home were really trying to write love poems. There was a more complete focus on question here with sound or better discussion of the named poems such as “anyone lived in a pretty how town” and “Love In A Life”, though “To My Mother” featured far less. Other texts chosen included “Rooms” and so on. Though there was quite a lot of uncritical agreement with the terms of the task, there was also some aversion to the assertion. Both positions produced some good writing (and some indifferent analysis also, of course) demonstrating clearly that as long as the candidates make a good choice of texts, it is often possible to take a positive or negative view on the proposition and do well in either case.

Question 4(a)

The idea of poets being obsessed with change when writing about land took many students directly and unequivocally to “Going, Going” and “The Trees Are Down”, for example. This was generally satisfactory or good, though there was perhaps insufficient comment even then on the second part of the task relating to the question of whether change was usually seen as wholly negative.

Question 4(b)

As “The Prelude” was the named poem for two of the anthologies, it got a lot of attention obviously. “The Bight” was not as popular even without its numerical disadvantage, it would seem. The Mark Scheme predicates the use of imagery to create theme, tone and mood and voice, amongst other things. Candidates were adept at identifying examples of imagery and often seemed well-equipped to comment on the effects of the examples under discussion but were less secure on the uses to which imagery is put which are suggested above.

Question 5(a)

Answers on the moral significance of work were often based on “The Chimney Sweeper”, “Toads”, “Toads Revisited”, “Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries”, “Miners” or “Felix Randall” for example. There was a good sense of what was intended in the question, though not always sufficient attempt to engage with the “good or otherwise” aspect of the stem. As elsewhere, simple narrative recount, linear structure (as opposed to more genuinely comparative approaches) and verse by verse commentary hampered less effective responses.

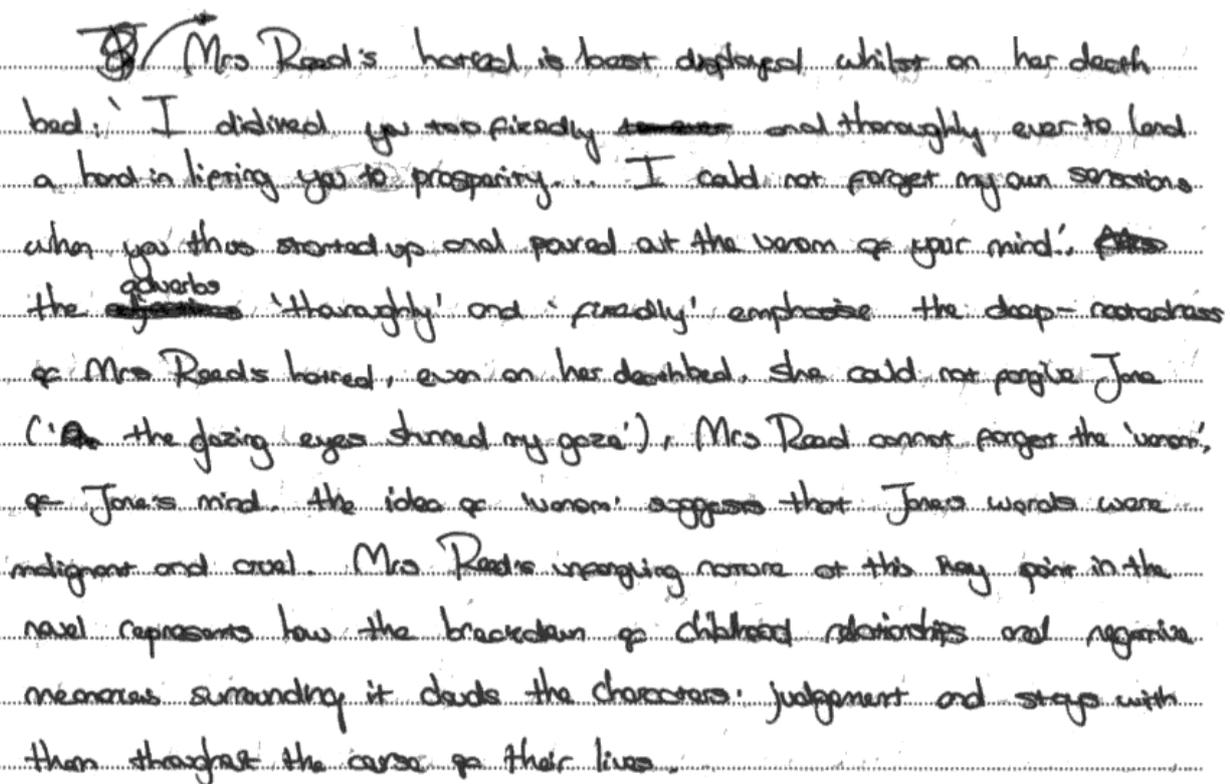
Question 5(b)

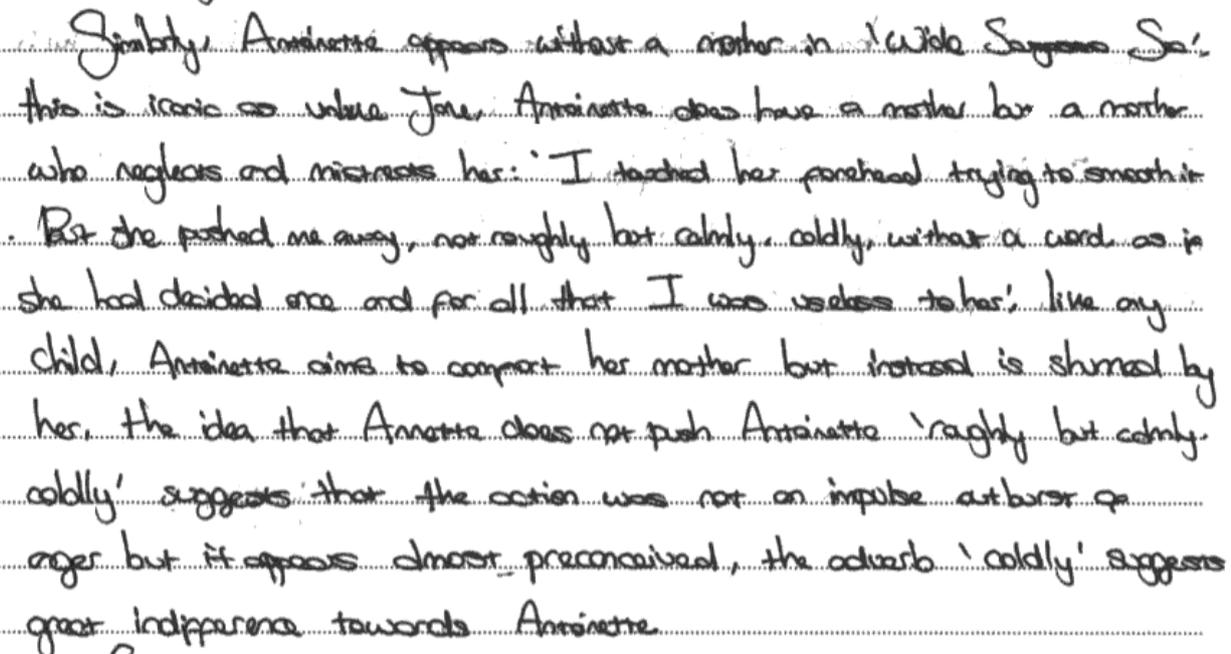
The named poems “Tractor” and “Money” predominated here, often supported by Larkin or Owen. “(D)ark tone and mood” was clearly understood and there was a good deal of sound and purposeful discussion, though it was not always as well directed to the “*how* (my italics) poets present work” element of the task. Diction, imagery, contrast, voice and other poetic techniques were often under-represented therefore.

Question 6(a)

Quite a lot of narrative and description ensued here...rather than analysis. Candidates recounted the events by which (mainly) Jane and Antoinette's family lives unfold as opposed to looking at how the families are presented via contrast, imagery, dialogue, etc. It might be better to focus on key scenes rather than adopt an all-encompassing approach, but perhaps it would be best not to make one of these the Red Room which, though it is justifiably well-known, tends to be used for every occasion.

This answer received 35 marks in total (14 plus 21).


 Mrs. Reed's hatred is best displayed whilst on her death bed: 'I did view you too fixedly ~~to~~ and thoroughly, ever to lend a hand in lying you to prosperity... I could not forget my own sensations when you thus started up and poured out the venom of your mind'. ~~Also~~ the ~~adjectives~~ ^{adverbs} 'thoroughly' and 'fixedly' emphasise the deep-rootedness of Mrs. Reed's hatred, even on her deathbed, she could not forgive Jane ('the glaring eyes shined my gaze'). Mrs. Reed cannot forget the 'venom' of Jane's mind. The idea of 'venom' suggests that Jane's words were indignant and cruel. Mrs. Reed's unchanging nature at this key point in the novel represents how the breakdown of childhood relationships and negative memories surrounding it define the characters: judgement and steps with them throughout the course of their lives.


 Similarly, Antoinette appears without a mother in 'Wide Sargasso Sea', this is ironic as unlike Jane, Antoinette does have a mother but a mother who neglects and mistreats her: 'I touched her forehead trying to smooth it. But she pushed me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her; like any child, Antoinette aims to comfort her mother but instead is shunned by her, the idea that Antoinette does not push Antoinette 'roughly but calmly, coldly' suggests that the action was not an impulse outburst of anger but it appears almost pre-conceived, the adverb 'coldly' suggests great indifference towards Antoinette.

Furthermore, the lack of love between Amnette and Anne is greatly displayed after the death of Anne: 'Christine cried bitterly but I could not. I prayed, but the words fell to the ground meaning nothing', Amnette's prayers for her mother appear half-hearted. The personification of the words falling emphasises their insignificance and potentially, Amnette's view of her mother as now insignificant.

Jane's ~~own~~ stronger ^{and family relationship} union is the marriage: ~~which~~ ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~strong~~ ~~base~~ ~~of~~ ~~their~~ ~~relationship~~

'The clasp holds were not broken from each other, for the firm base and strong roots keep them unshaken below' the splitting of the chestnut tree is an omen foreshadowing the unearthing of the truth about Bertha and the consequent separation between Jane and Rochester, metaphorically represented as 'the clasp holds'. However, the 'strong roots' ^{emphasise the depth of the bond between the unlikely couple,} which are the foundations of their relationship keep them united below the tragic surface, they are still joined in some way - through love, and there is the chance for a reunion, because it is clear that despite it all, they are still in ^{love}.

The tragedy of Bertha is merely used by ^{as a excuse for Jane to leave} ~~to~~ ~~be~~ ~~in~~ ~~order~~ ~~to~~ ~~deply~~ ~~and~~ ~~direct~~ ~~praise~~ ~~to~~ ~~her~~ readers that the love between Jane and Rochester is real and most importantly, unconditional.



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Examiner Comments

This extract demonstrates well integrated writing with good linkage between paragraphs and a sustained focus on both texts.



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Examiner Tip

To further improve the quality of this answer, even more specific technical analysis of use of dialogue and imagery (for example) might have featured.

Question 6(b)

Many candidates who chose this question seemed to enjoy writing about dramatic scenes and situations. They often had plenty to say about the extract prescribed and were able to note its tension and, less frequently, irony. There was some good work extending the argument with reference to “Wide Sargasso Sea” where the fire at Coulibri was a common choice and “The Magic Toyshop”, from which the puppet show tended to be selected. Candidates who fared less well generally struggled to explore the ways in which dramatic scenes and situations were developed, going instead for description and narrative at the expense of analysis.

Question 7(a)

The idea of the “creation of menace” made for a popular question and many students could plainly see how this was working in “Brighton Rock” and, more often than not “A Clockwork Orange”. There was much sensible character-focused writing, with occasional forays into the writers’ uses of contrast, especially relating to the portrayal of Pinkie and Rose (Ida Arnold also featured at times). Alex was an easy target also, but here fewer dimensions tended to be explored. What relatively little work was seen on “Lies of Silence” revolved mainly around the IRA figures especially. The nuance in this task centred on the word “relish”, which was seldom *really* addressed.

Question 7(b)

Male identity is a relatively uncomplicated proposition in this trio of texts and accordingly, plenty of answers went straight to Pinkie and Alex, examining their apparent enjoyment of violence, their oppression of or criminal behaviour towards women and their use of language. Dillon from “Lies of Silence” was discussed at times, but far fewer students took that route. There was some interesting debate about whether or not the reader sympathises with the versions of maleness represented by either of Pinkie or Alex, but this was often slightly under-developed.

Question 8(a)

There are many contrasts in “Pride and Prejudice” - the Mark Scheme suggests those between setting and characters as possibilities. The former was infrequently covered, the latter extensively. There was a lot of comment on the contrast between Elizabeth and Charlotte Lucas, between Elizabeth and her future husband, between the Bennet parents and so on, but not enough of it made sufficient mileage out of ‘the ways in which writers...create interest’ through the use of this important technique. Accordingly, the question that was most often answered was actually “‘Contrast is used to present character’. Discuss.”, which is at least mildly different. “The Yellow Wallpaper” predominated here, and this too led to a lot of writing about the narrator and her husband. There was very little consideration given to, for example, the contrast between the patient’s state of mind at the outset and the ending, or the ways in which this was used. “The French Lieutenant’s Woman” drew little interest here, but there are many, many contrasts in that text of course and the potential existed for much to be said.

Question 8(b)

Far less popular than the preceding task, the question on the “essentially unbelievable” nature of the characters and actions depicted did prompt some fine work however. Candidates leapt to the defence of both “Pride and Prejudice” and “The Yellow Wallpaper” with vigour and determination, demonstrating both engagement and interest in what they had studied - obviously desirable qualities. There was equally some fairly uncomplicated delineation of the life of the protagonist of the core text, explaining why what she did was actually very believable indeed but this only served to show that the question had differentiated well and therefore done the job required of it. Again “The French Lieutenant’s Woman” was sparingly used, but there was enough in that novel for readers to consider.

Question 9(a)

Heathcliff’s “survival” was the predominant matter for discussion amongst candidates opting for this question, though other members of the “Wuthering Heights” cast came in for consideration, naturally enough. “The Color Purple” remains overwhelmingly the most popular supporting text and there was some undoubted enthusiasm for writing about Celie’s struggles. Indeed, some candidates developed their arguments using the second novel almost equally to the first and centres are reminded that as long as the discussion remains relevant and interesting, this is not a problem - there is no necessary ratio of text use for Section C. “The Scarlet Letter” pops up occasionally and this session was no exception. Hester Prynne’s travails made good material for this task.

Question 9(b)

As regards the core text, “Yes it is.” was much the most favoured option amongst students who chose to contemplate whether or not “(t)his is a bleak and hopeless tale”. “Wuthering Heights” proved itself utterly downcast for the great majority (though “The Color Purple” was less depressing once you got beyond the shuddering misery of the opening sections, students conceded). Though not terribly subtle, this question was supposed to have some room for manoeuvre. Most answers got straight into high gear agreeing with the terms of the task and never looked back, perhaps missing an opportunity. Again “The Scarlet Letter” was rarely treated, but its tone and mood are rich sources of contemplation.

Question 10(a)

Drawing a handful of answers, this task once again generated some very strong work. The Schlegel sisters gain experience of the world somewhat differently in the end and the ways in which Forster demonstrates this were well discussed. Stevens’ gaining of such experience is relayed through a filter, which many candidates saw. “The Shooting Party” continues to see little action but there was enough to write about here, had anyone chosen to - the Mark Scheme suggests some possibilities.

Question 10(b)

Here too, there was only a small number of responses. Some students chose to see “Howards End” as anything but an uncomplicated love story and thereby produced good discursive work. However, at least one said that as regards Margaret, it was uncomplicated and produced an interesting argument in doing so, proving that this task could open up different interpretations and was therefore at the very worst, sound. There was a little bafflement regarding “The Remains of the Day”. “Is it a love story at all?” speculated one or two. If so, it’s oblique, they concluded, and therefore at least technically complicated. Others naturally settled into the peculiarities of Stevens’ “relationship” with Miss Kenton. “The Shooting Party” was barely touched and once again, centres are directed to the Mark Scheme for guidance.

Section C

On the whole, many centres seem to have become adept at preparing students for this exam, which is to be expected. That some candidates don't always take advantage of the teaching they receive is also something of a given. All parties are reminded that the primary focus for 6ET01 are AO1, 2 and 3 and that even then, the first and second of these dominate - only 20 out of the 100 marks available are apportioned to the third.

Accordingly, structure, form and language, concepts and terminology are the key contributing factors, along with coherent, accurate written expression. Although many of the tasks attempt to do some of the work for candidates by directing them explicitly towards techniques such as imagery, irony, tone and mood, language choices, dialogue, contrast, setting and characterisation for example, there remains a tendency amongst a significant proportion to opt for narration and description, particularly in Sections B and C.

As time goes on, the more nuanced aspects of questions will also begin to be of more importance, perhaps. It is always a good idea for students to spend a few moments considering what these finer points might actually be before launching into their answers.

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