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Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2023

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Subsidiary
and International Advanced Level in
English Literature (WET01)

Unit 1: Post 2000 Poetry and Prose

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Introduction

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

Standard Introduction

For this unit, WET01, the open book examination is 2 hours long and there are two sections.

All candidates must answer one question from a choice of two in Section A, Post-2000 Poetry. Candidates then respond to a question on their selected text from Section B, Post-2000 Prose.

For Section A, Post-2000 Poetry, students will use the reading skills they have developed through the course. Students will answer one essay question from a choice of two comparing a named poem from the prescribed list of poems from *Poems of the Decade: An Anthology of the Forward Books of Poetry 2002-11* with another poem of their own choice from the prescribed list.

For Section B, Post-2000 Prose, students answer one essay question from a choice of two on the prose text they have studied. Students can select from the following titles: *The Kite Runner*, *Life of Pi*, *The White Tiger*, *Brooklyn* and *Purple Hibiscus*. Students should study their chosen text in detail. Student responses will be informed by an appreciation of the contexts in which texts are written and read.

In studying for Post-2000 Poetry and Prose, students 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 25 marks available for Section A and 25 for Section B. The total mark of 50 represents 50% of the total IAS and 25% of the total IA2.

Section A, Post-2000 Poetry, assesses Assessment Objectives AO1, AO2 and AO4.

Section B, Post-2000 Prose, assesses Assessment Objectives AO1, AO2 and AO3.

AO5 is *not* assessed in this paper.

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

General Overview of the WET01 January 2023 (2301) paper and performance

This has been a successful paper. There were no errors, no erratum notices and no changes made to the mark scheme.

The number of entries was pleasing. It is to be hoped that the number of candidates sitting the paper will continue to increase in coming series. Many candidates demonstrated familiarity with the contents of the specification. Responses in relation to the set texts and to the range of Assessment Objectives were of varied quality.

In the 2301 series responses were received addressing all of the texts available for study.

For Section A, Post-2000 Poetry, some responses were less effective than others. Students did not always engage in sufficient depth and detail with the tasks set, and connections between the nominated poem and the candidates' selected poems were not always effectively established. There was a tendency in some cases for candidates to discuss their selected poem in greater depth than the set poem. It is important to remember that this section of the examination assesses AO4 and therefore time needs to be spent developing effective connections between the poems. Candidates explored a variety of potential interpretations of the poems – some more successful than others – and the methods the poets had employed. It is suggested that before commencing detailed analysis, it can be helpful to offer a brief consideration of the poems as a whole and what they might mean. It is also most important that candidates take time to consider the ways in which meanings are shaped in the poems. It was evident that some candidates had selected second poems that they felt they knew well rather than poems that would most effectively help them to respond to the task set. This is not an advisable strategy.

In Section B, the most popular prose text was *The Kite Runner* (Questions 3 and 4) and the second most popular *Purple Hibiscus* (Questions 11 and 12). It is significant to note that in relation to several of the texts, there were candidates who made insufficient or no reference to AO3. There was also a body of candidates who were less effective in considering AO2 – the ways in which meanings are shaped in texts. This inevitably meant that such candidates' marks, which are awarded on a best fit basis, were affected.

Some responses were not as fully and effectively developed as would be expected at A level, and in some cases there were issues with the quality and accuracy of written expression. Some responses were very brief and tended to be narrative in nature rather than exploring the topics set and the potential meanings of the texts.

Stronger responses had been effectively planned and prepared in response to the demands of the questions set and addressed the relevant Assessment Objectives. There was some evidence, however, of pre-prepared responses, and in these answers candidates inevitably did not manage to gain effective purchase on the tasks they had been set. Some responses relied on narrative or provided short, surface comments rather than exploring texts, literary methods and contexts more thoroughly. Centres are reminded that candidates should be prepared to use appropriate literary concepts and terminology, especially if they wish to access marks in the higher levels. This said, there were some examples of well-written and effectively crafted responses.

Detailed Commentary on individual questions

Section A: Post-2000 Poetry

Question 1

Most candidates chose to answer Question 1, comparing the use of time in ‘The Deliverer’ by Tishani Doshi and one other poem. A wide variety of second poems – some much more effective than others – was used: ‘Out of the Bag’, ‘Look We Have Coming to Dover!’, ‘Please Hold’, ‘The Lammas Hireling’, ‘Material’, ‘The Gun’, ‘Ode on a Grayson Perry Urn’, ‘On her Blindness’ and ‘The Map-Woman’. The most popular choices of poems for comparison were ‘An Easy Passage’, ‘To my Nine-Tear-Old Self’ and ‘Eat Me’. These poems provided relevant material for the question although not all were successfully analysed. Some candidates had clearly chosen their favourite poem rather than considering how it could be discussed in terms of the use of time. One candidate chose a poem that was not included in the list of prescribed poems. Centres must ensure that candidates use poems only from the prescribed list.

Writing on ‘The Deliverer’, many candidates offered details about poverty in Kerala, India. Not all realised that the sister mentioned in the poem was a nun; this resulted in some confusion. Changes in places and time were noted, but some candidates although referring to time, tended to stray from the issue to examine ideas such as infanticide and gender equality instead. There were

quite a few occasions when candidates considered poetic methods, structure or language at the end of their responses rather than incorporating it into their argument. Others chose to focus on one poem at a time rather than integrating their findings.

Example of a clear and concise introduction to Q1:

Both The Deliverer by Tishani Doshi and out of the bag by Seamus Heaney make use of time to explore their subject matter and the changes that occur. Both poems are structured chronologically and make use of sections,^{and} changes in location to show the passing of time. While both poems are centred around birth and children, Doshi ^{presents} ~~explores~~ the dark reality of ~~orph~~ children that are discarded by their parents due to being "crippled or dark or girls". Heaney, on the other hand, explores a person's ^{changing} perception of birth ^{and life} as they grow up. Time is used effectively in both poems to ~~add meaning to~~ show the journey ^{and development} of the speaker.

Question 2

Fewer candidates chose to answer this question, but some provided detailed analysis of the use of the natural world in 'History'. Comparison poems included 'Material', 'Giuseppe', 'Please Hold', 'Ode on a Grayson Perry Urn', 'Look We Have Coming to Dover!' and 'The Map-Woman'. Some of these poems were used well but others were much less effective as choices. The most popular

poems used for comparison were 'Chainsaw Versus the Pampas Grass', 'Look We Have Coming to Dover!' and 'The Furthest Distances I've travelled'. Some candidates focused on the theme of the natural world but on other occasions, candidates had clearly opted to write about their preferred poem rather than really engaging with the question. A number of responses comparing 'History' and 'Chainsaw Versus the Pampas Grass', for instance, seemed to be pre-prepared responses about the masculine/feminine dynamic of the poem rather than really engaging with the use of the natural world.

The following extract provides a good example of how the formal properties of poems can be used to relate to the meanings created (AO2):

it adapts a very rigid structure which feeds into the apparent belief that this is how things go and how things will always go with no room for escape.

General Observations on Section A

1. It is recommended that candidates consider carefully whether their chosen second poem effectively allows them to develop connections with the nominated poem in response to the question set. The best candidates established a clear sense of how the poems related to the themes of their chosen question and then proceeded to explore the poets' literary approaches and techniques to draw out how meanings are created.
2. In the Post-2000 Poetry section, candidates are required to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the function of genre features and conventions in poetry. They need to consider carefully a range of ways in which poets use language, form and structure, connecting these methods closely to potential meanings.

Section B: Post-2000 Prose

***The Kite Runner* (Khaled Hosseini)**

Questions 3 & 4

Question 3, the more popular of the two, focused on the presentation of loneliness in the novel. Many candidates demonstrated a sound knowledge of the text and provided relevant contexts, particularly about the conflict between Pashtuns and Hazaras. Other contexts included the place of women in Afghan society and Afghan history. The word 'loneliness' was not always used, and some responses tended to drift into an examination of misfits. Other responses, however, explored different types of loneliness, be it geographical, social, or psychological. Not all candidates looked at the way Hosseini had constructed the novel and more could have been made of the literary features and structure of the text. In some responses AO2 was in scant supply.

Question 4 focused on the presentation of threatening environments. There was plenty of material available for this answer. Many responses focused on the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and the social inequalities between Pashtuns and Hazaras. Some candidates also examined the United States as a threatening environment, and others considered more personal and psychological 'environments' between characters. There was a tendency for some responses to become character driven rather than engaging with a wider array of Hosseini's methods.

Here is a good example of the embedded use of context from an answer on *The Kite-Runner*.

Destructive~~ly~~, for all Afghan society, is the inability to absorb the Hazara minority within their ethnicity. Pashtons are thought to be pure and original Afghans, like Amir and Baba, whilst Hazaras are viewed as inferior and expendable, like Hassan. There is an "engraved sense of hierarchy" as the narrator lyrically describes, dressing up the brutality of ethnic divisions. Pashtons are masters, Hazaras are servants. "What use did a servant have for written word?" Amir as a child wonders

***Life of Pi* (Yann Martel)**

Questions 5 & 6

Question 5 was the more popular option on this novel. It addressed the idea of traumatic events in the novel. Question 6, answered by very few candidates, considered the role of fate. Many candidate responses to Martel's novel, as has been observed in previous Examiner Reports, contained limited (or no) relevant contextual information. Centres are reminded that AO3 is assessed in Section B of this paper and that candidates must be prepared to write about appropriate contexts. A number of candidates tended to provide largely narrative responses.

***The White Tiger* (Aravind Adiga)**

Questions 7 & 8

Very few candidates answered on *The White Tiger*. Question 7, on Adiga's use of symbols, and Question 8, on the presentation of dissatisfaction in the novel, attracted equal numbers of responses. Some candidates dealt with the tasks clearly and provided a body of relevant contextual material as well as considering the ways in which Adiga shapes meanings.

***Brooklyn* (Colm Toibin)**

Questions 9 & 10

Markers observed that many of the weakest responses they marked in Section B were on *Brooklyn*. Question 9 required candidates to write about the novel's presentation of positive aspects of life, while Question 10 considered the complexities of love. The majority of responses were narrative or descriptive in approach, and although this novel is ripe for contextual exploration, these factors were often only dealt with in a simple, surface manner. Many responses tended to treat characters and events as if they were real rather than as textual constructs.

***Purple Hibiscus* (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie)**

Questions 11 & 12

Question 11, much the more popular option for this novel, considered Adichie's presentation of family life; Question 12 addressed the novel's presentation of unfamiliar situations. Overall, candidates displayed a good knowledge of the text, but there was a marked tendency for responses to be narrative rather than analytical in nature. Little attention was paid to the literary structure and imagery of the novel or to other AO2 features, and while some responses delved into the social, political and religious contexts of Nigeria, this was rare.

General Observations on Section B

1. Marks at all levels were awarded in this section. Responses ranged from very brief answers providing surface readings of texts or a narrative overview through to fuller critical and evaluative essays.
2. A number of candidates in the top levels were able to refer to a range of contextual factors and the impact these had on their readings of the texts. A significant number of candidates, however, did not deal with AO3

effectively, or even at all. Contexts, whether of production or of reception should be used consistently and formatively in answers and should not appear simply as 'bolted on' information.

3. Candidates should be prepared to explore the craft of the texts they have studied in relation to form (what is a novel, and how does it work?) and writers' use of language across full texts. It is important to demonstrate how specific examples relate more broadly to what is happening in the text as a whole – i.e. that they demonstrate that these are not isolated examples.
4. Less effective responses tended to resort to narrative rather than engaging in more detailed and critical analysis of the ideas set out in the questions.

Paper Summary

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

- consider the AOs covered in each section of the paper and ensure these are explicitly addressed;
- encourage candidates to discuss the effects of literary techniques they identify, exploring them as ways in which writers create meaning;
- demonstrate awareness that not all readers or members of societies (past and present) see things in the same way;
- ensure that candidates take care to respond to the questions set and advise against the use of pre-prepared responses;
- avoid the narrative re-telling of texts.

Thank you.

Principal Examiner
(IAL English Literature WET0 01)
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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>

