

Examiners' Report

January 2012

International GCSE English Literature
(4ET0/02)
Paper 2: Poetry

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Publications Code UG030420

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Introduction

This English Literature examination successfully enables a range of candidates to show their knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the poems in the Poetry Anthology they have studied, but also offers the opportunity to respond to an unseen poem if chosen.

The candidate is expected to make one response, in forty five minutes, on poems from the Anthology booklet or the unseen poem from the examination paper.

Many centres are familiar with the expectations from this examination and, as in the June 2011 session, time management did not prove problematic.

Candidate Choices

Candidates chose between three questions. Whereas in the June 2011 session the majority of candidates chose the second question, on this occasion question 3, which required the candidates to compare two chosen poems from the anthology, was by far the most popular. This question asked the candidates to compare how the theme of Death was handled in two poems: within this question, the most common choices were *Remember* and *Do Not Go Gentle*

The next most popular choice of question was the second question; this question specified TWO poems from the anthology, inviting candidates to comment on the different views of women represented in *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* and *Refugee Camp*. The unseen poem, *Stealing*, was the least popular choice.

It should be noted, however, that the total entry for January 2012 was quite small: it is therefore very difficult to offer generalised feedback, on the basis of such a small sample of scripts.

General Information for Centres

The most successful candidates answering the unseen poem in question 1, 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 act of theft itself, and how the persona created by the poet had an identity, if not a personality and a moral code.

The most successful responses from candidates answering questions 2 and 3 were able to compare two poems confidently alongside each other when discussing content, language and themes; in particular they were able to make comparisons between similarities and differences of each poem

The least successful responses from candidates answering the unseen poem in question one were unable to show a full understanding of the content of the poem, which therefore posed problems when trying to provide a critical

analysis of the themes and choice of language. In one or two cases, a somewhat simplistic interpretation hindered performance.

The least successful responses from candidates answering questions 2 and 3 tended to give either a detailed background to the poets themselves or gave a predominantly narrative account of each poem, which suggested that the candidates did not have a clear understanding of the content, themes and language used. These 'narrative' responses were all too common, even in such a small sample: a simple commentary on the narrative does not meet the need for thoughtful comment.

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, enjambment AND were able to discuss why the poet had chosen these devices, giving a personal response as to the effect that was required and the degrees of success that resulted: NB below, however.

Where candidates were least successful in their responses, devices were either identified without explanation or were simply listed – almost in what appeared to be a checklist of observations; it would be more effective for candidates to pick out one or two devices and analyse them in detail, rather than trying to identify as many devices as possible. This point cannot be over-emphasised: 'feature-spotting' is no substitute for genuine analysis.

There was a good selection of essays in the upper level, with a few that were creative and original in their response to the poems. Responses were often 'technical', focusing on a detailed analysis of language and structure in relation to the question posed, and therefore the points developed warranted the higher band. A few responses showed real originality, and considerable insight. At the very top end, there were some responses of considerable maturity, even within this small sample.

Essays in the middle two levels were often able to give a personal response to the poems and to relate this to the essay question posed. Responses were clearly written and utilised appropriately chosen quotations to support their ideas

Essays in the lower level often found it difficult to steer away from a narrative approach, although in some cases a weakness in interpretation also held back the level of achievement.

Section A: Unseen 20th century Poem

The poem *Stealing* was chosen for Section A as it provides many opportunities for exploration and discussion; it was felt that the poem should be accessible on different levels.

It was the intention that the candidates achieving the lower levels would be able to access the literal descriptions of the events, whilst the candidates achieving the middle and higher levels would be able to start uncovering some of the subtleties in the expression, engaging with the themes and

ideas more fully. Of the very few candidates who attempted this question, some were not able to offer a full grasp of meaning, and achievement was therefore limited; there were then only a handful of answers in the middle grades; and then, delightfully, there were some outstanding responses at the very top end, responding to this unseen poem with a depth of understanding not often seen at this level.

Section B: Poems from the Anthology

Question 2 asked candidates to compare *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* with *Refugee Camp*, focusing on the different views of women which the two poems provide.

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.

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

However, once into level three, candidates were expected to be clearly discussing how representations of women, their roles and lives and experience, are shown in each poem, giving specific textual references as evidence. It was hoped that in level three, candidates would be exploring contrasts and comparisons between the two poems in order to further evidence their observations in relation to the question.

These expectations, of course, would not change from one session to another, in broad terms.

As with question one, there were barely enough responses on which to base a generalised comment, but it did seem that *Refugee Camp*, perhaps because of the vivid images drawn by the poet, was the more accessible of the two. Almost all the candidates who wrote about this poem brought out the horror of the mother's situation, and were able to point to appropriate examples from the poem to illustrate their views. *La Belle Dame...* proved more challenging, it seemed: however, those candidates who took note of the need to Compare, as stated in the question, achieved more – as always – than those who merely offered narrative accounts of the two poems.

Section C

Question 3 asked candidates to compare any two poems, from the anthology, which showed the theme of Death. Candidates were permitted to choose any poems from the anthology, but the expectation was that they would find poems which focused on death.

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 always make the most appropriate selection, in their initial choice of poems.

Candidates achieving the middle two levels were expected to know the poems in more detail, with level two candidates – at the least – responding in a narrative manner, showing their understanding of the poems' content, if offering little more in the way of comment.

However, once into level three, candidates were expected to be clearly discussing how the theme of death is shown in each poem, giving specific textual references as evidence. To achieve level three, candidates would be expected to explore contrasts and comparisons between the two poems, in order to provide further evidence in support of their observations in relation to the question.

Candidates achieving the highest level were expected to be using integrated quotations in their writing and to be finding significant comparisons and contrasts across poems; there were some candidates who fulfilled these expectations, with very pleasing outcomes.

Although still not providing a large sample, this was the most popular question, in January 2012. As well as the two poems mentioned above, *Remember* and *Do Not...*, *War Photographer* featured a number of times; and a small range of other poems was also chosen, with varying success.

In response to this question, the majority of candidates showed evidence of straightforward understanding, and there were very few who could not, as a minimum, offer a narrative account of their two choices. For many, though, things were not taken much further: often the narrative account was left to stand on its own, with limited interpretative skills to be seen. As with question one, there then seemed to be fewer responses in the middle grades; and then some very strong answers at the top end. The hallmark of these strong responses was their sophisticated analysis of technique and style, often showing a mature understanding of the poets' effects and of how these had been achieved. Congratulations are due to the candidates – and to their teachers – who had such a clear grasp of both content and expression, and who could express their views in such lucid and coherent manner.

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