

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2011

International GCSE
English Literature (4ET0) Paper 02

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Publications Code UG027886

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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 one poem from either the Anthology booklet or the unseen poem from the examination paper.

Many centres are familiar with the expectations from this examination and time management did not prove problematic.

Candidate Choices

Candidates chose between three questions.

The majority of candidates chose the second question; this question asked the candidate to compare how life is presented in the poems *If* and *Prayer before Birth*.

The next most popular choice of question chosen was the third question; this question asked the candidate to choose TWO poems from the anthology which appropriately represented the theme of love.

The unseen poem, *November*, by the British poet, Simon Armitage, was the least popular choice by candidates but was still chosen by some three hundred candidates. This question asked the candidate to explore the theme, content and language of the poem freely.

General Information for Centres

- The most successful candidates answering the unseen poem in question one, 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 title in terms of symbolism
- The most successful responses from candidates answering questions two and three 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 an 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
- The least successful responses from candidates answering questions two and three 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
- 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
- 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
- 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. However, some very successful responses were succinct, yet explorative and

analytical, showing that a higher level answer does not need pages and pages of writing

- 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 were not able to give a personal response to the poems and found it difficult to steer away from a narrative approach

Section A: Unseen 20th century Poem

The poem *November*, by Simon Armitage, was chosen for section A as it provides many opportunities for exploration and discussion; it was felt that the poem should be uncovered in a holistic manner – not just focussing on the content, since the title, the structure and the characterisation of the poem were also effectively crafted to allow candidates to respond to a variety of areas. The poem was considered to 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 metaphorical devices and be able to read deeply into the emotions of the characters and to empathise.

It was hoped that the higher level candidates would be able to focus on the title of the poem and discuss how this relates to the content of the poem from a symbolic perspective.

Particular noteworthy analysis made by candidates and / or examples of good practice:

- A good example of the analysis of the title: *"The title is a month of the year relating to autumn, it could be said that this month is in reference to a season where everything falls apart and dies – much like the grandma mentioned who is about to die."*
- A good example which considers the writer's craft: *"The author of this poem gives the reader an insight to his feelings concerning death; he thinks it is inevitable "We let it happen", "We can say nothing" and this inspires pity in the reader, which is reinforced by the weakness of the grandma who walks very slowly, as indicated in the first stanza."*
- A good example of originality of interpretation and contrast: *"Here we feel like the poet is a robot who gives orders to John. Small details such as the "badly parked car" or the "famous station" contrast with important details like "numb ourselves with alcohol" to create the effect of the poet being some kind of GPS system."*
- A good example of uncovering other elements to the poem: *"Fate seems an important theme throughout the poem. Grandma's forthcoming death is compared to the sun sinking and the night coming; the protagonists can't do anything to prevent the sun from disappearing (death)."*

- A good example of structural analysis: *"The last stanza appears to be short of one line, which gives the impression of a sudden cut, or in this context, the unpredictability of death as we didn't expect the stanza to be shorter."*
- A good example of a reflective personal response: *"To me, the poem seems harsh, but is also a good reflection on real life. The poet's attitude seems shocking at first, but then I realised that he means "life goes on". The narrator obviously feels guilty about what has happened, as he mentions himself in a negative way (getting drunk, being monsters)."*

Section B: Poems from the Anthology

Question 2 asked candidates to compare *If* and *Prayer before Birth*, from the anthology, to discuss and explore the representations of life by the poets. These poems were chosen as a contrast to the harsh content of the section A unseen poem, but were also chosen as they show contrasting views – Kipling showing that anything is possible and MacNiece showing that life is a battle against evil.

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 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 life are shown in each poem, giving specific textual references as evidence. It was hoped that these whilst in level three, candidates would be starting to find contrasts and comparisons between the two poems in order to further evidence their observations in relation to the question.

Candidates could also achieve level three however, if they used connectives to link their paragraphs, thus showing an attempt to compare and contrast; eg. *However, on the other hand, Also, I can also see, Similarly, In contrast...*

Candidates achieving the highest level were expected to be using integrated quotations in their writing and to be automatically finding comparisons and contrasts across poems; this was most effective when two poems were compared in one paragraph. It was also an expectation that candidates would comment on the effectiveness of the choice of poems and how they related to the requirements of the question, utilising a detailed and analytical personal response.

Particular noteworthy analysis made by candidates and / or examples of good practice:

- A good example of analysis of the theme: "*'If' and 'Prayer before birth' present the narrators' views on life as a whole; although these views are explored differently, based on the context of both poems, they are also different in terms of the ideas of the authors, as well as the manipulation of structure and layout*".
- A good example which considers the writer's craft: "*The title 'If' is conditional and suggests choice, therefore is immediately engaging*."

It is a well-crafted piece of rhetoric, in which Kipling presents readers with a catalogue of values and virtues that one should possess, in order to live a successful, fulfilling life."

- A good example of originality of interpretation and contrast: *"As opposed to the motivating tone of 'If', 'Prayer before Birth' is cynical and pessimistic."*
- A good example of uncovering other elements to the poems: *"Prayer before birth however, looks at life in a different, cynical light. The word 'Prayer' used in the title links to the reverential language used and 'before birth' is thematically significant, as it establishes the idea of a child, a symbol of purity, being inevitably corrupted by the negative influence of society."*
- A good example of structural analysis: *"The third stanza in 'Prayer before birth' proves to be an anomaly in the poem as it is the only positive one, describing nature. MacNeice comments on how, contrasted to mankind which takes from him, robbing him of his individuality, nature provides him with the aforementioned, thus showing how the entities not under the direct control of mankind are positive."*
- A good example of a reflective personal response: *"In my opinion 'If' an evidently idealistic poem successfully serves its purpose, for Kipling, with his gentle yet determined tone, motivates readers and instils in them that they can do it. However I feel it is simply too idealistic, for the challenges we face in life don't always allow us to act in the manner Kipling states we should."*

Section B: Poems from the Anthology

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

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 refer to the theme of love but would have at least chosen poems which have love in the content or as the theme.

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

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

Candidates at level three often used connectives to link their paragraphs, thus showing an attempt to compare and contrast; eg. *However, on the other hand, Also, I can also see, Similarly, In contrast...*

Candidates achieving the highest level were expected to be using integrated quotations in their writing and to be finding comparisons and contrasts across poems; this was most effective when the two poems were compared in one paragraph.

It was also an expectation that candidates would give reasons for their choice of poem and how it appropriately met the requirements of the question, utilising a detailed and analytical personal response. However, it must be identified that this question was the weakest in this area and many candidates struggled to justify their choices.

Pairings chosen were as follows (In order of popularity):

La Belle Dame Sans Merci with *Remember*

Sonnet 116 with *Remember*

Sonnet 116 with *Poem at Thirty-Nine*

Sonnet 116 with *My Last Duchess*

Particular noteworthy analysis made by candidates and / or examples of good practice:

- A good example of analysis of the theme: "*'Sonnet 116' and 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' are two poems which present the theme of love.*

However although they share similar ideas in this regard, they explore the effects of love in different perspectives."

- A good example which considers the writer's craft: *"In 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', Keats crafts a strong relationship between a tough 'knight' and an enchanting 'faery's child'. We see in this depiction how Keats suggests that the knight is rendered powerless through his worshipping of the might of love."*
- A good example of originality of interpretation and contrast: *"However they do not share the same attitude towards love and they explore this differently. Shakespeare explores the beauty of love by personifying it through the description of the 'rosy lips and cheeks' to show the innocent and charmed emotion, which proves love to be pure, true and enduring. Whilst Keats in contrast explores the effects of unrequited love, which renders the knight lonely, wandering aimlessly with no true sense of purpose in life."*
- A good example of structural analysis: *"Similarly, in Rosetti's sonnet there is a constant repetition of the title 'Remember', which acts as an imperative, suggesting how desperately the persona wants to cling onto her life with her lover."*
- A good example of a reflective personal response: *"In conclusion, both 'Sonnet 115' and 'Remember' portray true love from different contexts, showing that love can conquer all regardless of what is thrown at it."*

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