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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel IAL in English Literature (WET01)

Unit 1: Post 2000 Poetry and Prose

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## **Introduction**

Centres are thanked for choosing Pearson Edexcel as their International A level English Literature provider.

WET01 is an open book examination lasting two hours. The examination is in two sections.

### **Section A: Post-2000 Poetry**

Candidates 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. Section A assesses Assessment Objectives AO1, AO2 and AO4.

### **Section B: Post-2000 Prose**

Candidates answer one essay question from a choice of two on their selected text from the following options: *The Kite Runner*, *Life of Pi*, *The White Tiger*, *Brooklyn* and *Purple Hibiscus*. Students are required to demonstrate an appreciation of the contexts in which texts are written and read. Section B assesses Assessment Objectives AO1, AO2 and AO3.

Note that AO5 is *not* assessed in this paper.

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.

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

## **General Overview of the WET01 June 2024 (2406) paper and performance**

- This has been a successful paper.
- Most candidates demonstrated familiarity with the contents of the specification.
- Responses in relation to the set texts and to the range of Assessment Objectives covered the full range of marks and levels.
- Responses were received addressing all the texts available for study.

### **Section A: Post-2000 Poetry**

Many effective responses were seen to the tasks in this section of the paper. However, as in previous series, some candidates did not engage in relevant and detailed ways with the tasks set. It is essential that candidates explicitly address the questions set, as failure to do so has a considerable impact on the marks that can be awarded. This section also assesses AO4. This requires the consideration of connections between the poems, and the selection of second poem therefore needs to be carefully considered. There was a tendency amongst some candidates to discuss the chosen poem in greater depth than the set poem and to allow it to dominate. This is not advisable. As in previous years, some candidates had selected second poems that they liked or felt they knew best rather than opting for poems that really fitted well with the task set.

Candidates are reminded that AO2 requires the consideration of how meanings are shaped in literary texts. This includes analysis of the writers' lexical choices, but analysis at word level alone is not sufficient. Candidates should be prepared to explore a range of poetic and structural effects the poets employ and to analyse how these methods contribute to the meanings of the poems.

Many candidates developed appropriate structures for their writing and followed arguments through to appropriate conclusions, supporting their writing by appropriate references to the poems. However, there are some general observations it is worth making:

- Paragraphing was not always effective, making it difficult to see the shape of some candidates' arguments.
- It is helpful if texts and names of authors are included in the opening paragraph to assist with clarity.
- Some candidates decided to refer to Text A and Text B but did not always maintain this and reverted to the names of the poems. This mixed approach proved confusing at times.

## **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). Responses were, however, received on all the set prose texts. It has been pleasing to note that in this series, candidates working on *Brooklyn* and *Life of Pi* have in general been more effectively prepared to address the requirements of AO3.

Centres are reminded that AO2 requires candidates to write about the ways in which meanings are shaped in texts. Given that the texts in this section are lengthy works of prose, close analysis at word and sentence level is not adequate in itself. Candidates need to be prepared to discuss a variety of the methods writers of prose fiction employ and the effects they achieve, including but not limited to use of structure, genre, settings, characterisation, narrative voice and tone. It is also important to consider how textual examples can be related to what is happening more broadly within the texts.

Stronger responses were well planned and effectively addressed the demands of the questions set, addressing all relevant Assessment Objectives. There was some evidence, however, of candidates using preprepared responses or learnt sections. In such cases, relevance to the task was often not achieved as well as it might have been.

## **Detailed Commentary**

## **Section A: Post-2000 Poetry**

### **Question 1**

This was the less popular question in Section A. However, many of the candidates who selected to answer on 'Please Hold' by Ciaran O'Driscoll were able to respond to the frustration of the character in the poem as he tries to communicate with the robotic voice on the telephone. Weaker responses tended to focus on meaning without engaging in literary analysis. In stronger answers, however, candidates observed a range of methods the poet employs to create frustration. Many noticed the way the wife was involved in (and somewhat the cause of) frustration. Some commented on the structure of the poem, noting how the first stanza was much longer paralleling the phone call and the second stanza consisted of three lines only, representing the unsatisfactory conclusion the character obtains. There was awareness of the repetition of words and phrases as a representation of frustration, and especially the character's increasingly agitated tone of voice.

The poem was compared to a wide variety of other poems from the anthology including 'The Map-Woman', 'Look We have Coming to Dover!', 'Material', 'Effects', 'An Easy Passage' and 'Ode on a Grayson Perry Urn'. Whilst candidates evidently knew these second poems well, they did not always provide the most suitable comparisons. More suitable and more popular poems selected were 'From the Journal of a Disappointed Man', 'On Her Blindness', 'A Minor Role' and 'Chainsaw versus the Pampas Grass'.

Here we see an example of developed and discriminating analysis in response to Question 1:

Nevertheless, even after each characters' respective explosion of frustration, there is still a sense of inescapability from their problem. In "Please Hold", the final stanza, filled with the anaphora of "Please" and the repetitive internal rhyme, displays this inescapability from "the future" that has now taken over and that, despite his frenzy and frustration, the truth remains that "this is the future. We are already there and it's the same as the present", and that the only outlet, the only temporary escape is through humour and irony, as displayed throughout this poem. In "Eat Me", on the other hand, the resolution to the climax and tipping point is filled with bathos and quite anticlimactic, which may leave the reader even more frustrated. The structure of the poem would suggest the speaker has gained power. The poem is made of ten tercets,

**Comment:** Notice the way the candidate blends discussion of the poems and incorporates well-exemplified consideration of the poets' methods in relation to the central idea of frustration.

## Question 2

This was the more popular Section A question, probably because of the perennial popularity of 'Eat Me' with candidates. Many took great delight in exploring the idea of harsh experience in the poem and in considering its potential meanings. Some responses opted to interpret 'harsh experience' as oppression of women. This was a fair enough approach, but perhaps tended to limit breadth of response. Many commented on the initial age/weight

confusion in Agbabi's presentation of the cake and identified the source of the words EAT ME as *Alice in Wonderland*. It would have been good, however, to see fuller consideration of why this reference to Lewis Carroll might be significant. There was much discussion of the poet's use of descriptive language and vivid descriptions, but less in the way of meaningful analysis of the poem's structure.

A range of comparison poems was seen: 'An Easy Passage', 'The Lammas Hireling', 'The Map-Woman', 'A Minor Role', 'Genetics', 'Effects', 'Material' and 'Look We Have Coming to Dover!'. Some candidates were successful in creating comparisons using these poems, but the most popular and effective options were 'Giuseppe', 'The Deliverer', 'The Gun', 'On her Blindness' and 'Chainsaw versus the Pampas Grass'.

Here is an extract from a rather general Level 2 response to Question 2:

The poet's both use the theme of being played with. They both go through very hard times and have to take or deal with what they are given. But in "eat me" the poem is more about <sup>rebellion</sup> ~~rebellion~~ and how the woman decided to take matters in her own hands and kill the guy giving her food, and taking action in her own hands.

**Comment:** Notice the lack of specific and clear reference to the poems and the general tone of the writing.

By contrast, here is a stronger response:

In 'Eat Me', the harsh experience faced by the persona was the force-feeding ~~at~~ by her former lover. The poem opens with her eating a "cake/ three layers of icing... EAT ME... poured olive oil down my throat". The capitalisation and repetition of the title ~~is~~ <sup>creates a</sup> rather warped view of ~~the woman's~~ domestic life as the woman is being looked after by her husband - not neglected physically like the children in Dashi's poem - but her emotional and psychological needs are completely disregarded as her partner feeds her to fatten her up. The persona suffers from obesity as alluded by the "thirty... stone" reference that ambiguously could mean age or weight. The persona also describes how her "hips sudder like a juggernaut". The simile alone emphasises her truck-like size, but the alliteration almost recreates the wobble of her body, creating a darkly comical image. It is almost self-deprecating how she describes herself.

**Comment:** The candidate's controlled writing and analysis typifies performance in the Level 4 range.

### General Observations on Section A

1. Overall, responses showed that students had been prepared effectively on the list of prescribed poems.
2. A range of poems was referenced with some interesting comments, but candidates needed on occasions to think more carefully about their

choice of second poems in order to develop effective and meaningful connections.

3. Some less successful responses tended to lapse into contextual comments, forgetting that AO3 is not assessed in Section A.
4. A small number candidates infringed the examination rubric by: a) writing about one poem only; b) writing on a poem not on the list of prescribed poems; or c) comparing the set poem with more than one other.
5. In the Post-2000 Poetry section, candidates are required to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the function of poetic methods. They need to consider carefully the range of ways in which poets use language, form and structure, connecting these methods closely to potential meanings.

## Section B: Post-2000 Prose

### Questions 3 & 4: *The Kite Runner* (Khaled Hosseini)

Question 3 considered the presentation of destructive behaviour in the novel. Responses were seen across the full range. Many candidates commented on central characters such as Amir and Assef as key examples of characters displaying destructive behaviour. Some generic responses looked exclusively at Hassan and Amir's relationship and/or at limited elements of the novel, such as the alleyway scene. Others developed a broader stance, seeing most of the characters – and society more broadly – as capable of destructive behaviour. Hassan, for example, finds his loyalty and passive nature to be destructive and a cause of suffering and difficulty. A significant number of candidates also discussed Baba's hypocrisy and how this in turn fuels Amir's mistreatment of Hassan. Many candidates included relevant contextual material, though in some cases this could be somewhat undigested and had a tendency to dominate sections of their writing. AO2 was the weakest objective with some candidates treating events and characters as if they were real, rather than demonstrating how they are literary constructs.

Question 4 was the more popular of the two options on *The Kite Runner*. Social status was related to a number of issues in the novel, including but not limited to religious denominations, ethnic groups, rich and poor, and men and women. More sophisticated responses engaged with a wide and interesting range of examples from across the novel rather than relying simply on the big set scenes. In lower-level responses, there was some extended explanation and description of ethnic, gender or other divides without meaningful links either to the narrative or to relevant contexts. Candidates again showed considerable knowledge in relation to AO3, drawing on material related to Afghanistan and beyond, including the effect of recent historical and political developments on their readings of the novel. As with Question 3, the least effectively addressed objective was AO2.

Here we see an example of a candidate writing in response to Question 4:

Hosseini effectively establishes the difference in privilege between the Pashtuns and the Hazaras from the beginning of the novel, when Amir recalls his childhood. Amir and Baba have a privileged background as Pashtun men, whereas their servants (and friends/family) are often faced with prejudice. Despite Ali and Baba growing up together, as well as Amir and Hassan growing up together, their classes are separated even in the domestic sphere, Baba and Amir living in their 'mansion', while Ali and Hassan live in their 'mud hut', despite all of them living together on the same property, which symbolises the larger issue of the marginalisation of Hazaras, the minority group in Afghanistan. This difference in wealth and privilege is amplified outside of their family home, as Ali and Hassan are constantly ridiculed and dehumanised by the people around them, most significantly Assef, Amir's childhood bully. Assef, as well as other children, call Ali 'Babalu', meaning flat-nosed monkey, to mock Ali's Mongoloid features, which are common due to many Hazaras being from Mongolian descent. Children making negative remarks about Hazaras from an early age shows the impact and influence of societal hierarchies, and how early negative stereotypes are taught. Despite Amir's more liberal upbringing, and growing up with having a Hazara best friend, Amir's internalised prejudice of Hassan, and of Hazaras, is reflected in his attempts to self-justify his betrayal of Hassan, when he tells himself that 'maybe Assef was right. Nothing was free in this world. Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba'. Amir is characterised as sensitive to words, and easily influenced, which is seen through his remarks of 'maybe Assef was right', or 'maybe Baba was right', and the use of 'maybe' solidifies his unsureness and his naivety as a character. This symbolises a larger issue in society, as it compounds on the idea of children being easily influenced by what they are told, showing the power of language. By commodifying Hassan as a tool or 'price', Amir aligns to Assef's prejudiced beliefs, as Assef refers to Hassan as Amir's 'toy', objectifying him, thus turning him into a tool as well. By referring to Hassan as a 'lamb', Amir further dehumanises him, categorising him below humans, further emphasising the difference in their status and privilege, and also compounding on Assef's beliefs, since Assef had also called Hassan Amir's 'loyal dog' in the past as well. Amir's justifications align with Assef's derogatory and oppressive language, as well as contributing to the dehumanisation of Hazaras, despite Afghanistan at the time being seen as prosperous, thriving and progressive, under the rule of King Zahir Shah, and perhaps Hosseini contradicts progressiveness and subconscious prejudice to emphasise the impact of hierarchies in society that has been established for a long time, even before the political turmoil in the country, and the oppression from powers such as the Taliban.

**Comment:** The writing is consistently controlled and there is an embedding of material across the Assessment Objectives. Notice how the candidate returns to the idea of the characters as constructs by drawing attention to the methods of characterisation employed.

### **Questions 5 & 6: *Life of Pi* (Yann Martel)**

Questions 5 was the more popular choice on *Life of Pi* and gave rise to some interesting and thoughtful answers on the presentation of appearance and reality. Comments were made on Martel's use of biblical allusions, classical references, philosophy and magic realism, relating these effectively to the ways in which he opens up and exploits narrative gaps. It was good to see candidates considering the role and effect of the author's note, the significance of the alternative endings of the novel, and the kinds of narrative tensions these lead to. It is pleasing to see that centres have thought about how candidates can more effectively address AO3 in relation to this novel.

Question 6, though not so popular, elicited some effective responses. Candidates considered a variety of the settings Martel employs in the novel. The Algae Island and the zoo proved particularly popular, with some discussion also of the lifeboat. In lower-level responses, the settings were described rather than analysed, and there was not always a clear sense of their significance and potential meanings in relation to the novel's broader concerns.

### **Questions 7 & 8: *The White Tiger* (Aravind Adiga)**

*The White Tiger* attracted fewer responses than other texts. However, Question 7 on the influence of the past in the novel and Question 8 on the presentation of betrayal both led to some interesting responses. Candidates drew on a range of appropriate contextual ideas related to Adiga's presentation of social transitions in modern day India and how these are experienced and represented in characters and situations in the novel. Many responses focused largely on Balram, and it would be good to see candidates widening their frame of reference to consider in more depth the roles and functions of the other characters, ideas and situations Adiga presents.

### **Questions 9 & 10: *Brooklyn* (Colm Toibin)**

In responding to Question 9, on the presentation of isolation in the novel, most candidates focused on Eilis. A range of interesting and relevant ideas emerged,

with several candidates arguing that even at moments where Ellis is in company, she finds herself personally and/or culturally isolated. There were, however, some interesting responses which looked at her mother as well as her brothers and sister. Candidates' use of context was by and large clear and relevant and at times discriminating. It was good to see candidates engaging in a more analytical fashion with AO2, but it is important that candidates move on from detailed language analysis to engage with a broader range of means by which the novelist seeks to shape meanings.

Here we see an example of a very general response to Q9:

The main character Ellis, first felt the feeling of isolation when she felt forced to go to America. "She did not want to go." This could link with <sup>adolescence</sup> ~~adolescence~~ to adulthood, her not wanting to go to America could mean that she doesn't want to grow up and become an adult instead wants to stay in her childhood home town.

Her sister Rose and her brother Jack both isolated their feeling and secrets. Rose hid the fact that she had an illness from her family to "protect" them. But in the end she dies. Whereas, Jack hid the fact that he felt homesick from his family so they don't "worry" about him. The whole family has an obvious problem of mentally isolating themselves from others. This could be one reason why Ellis felt really isolated in Brooklyn, because she was already mentally isolated.

**Comment:** Note the way in which Eilis and her family are presented as 'real'.

In the following extract, by way of contrast, we see a more effectively developed response:

Although she is however, the idea of 'isolation' is not only shown through physical, but emotional detachment and separation from others, mainly people close to them, and the dreams one could aspire. ~~This isolation is~~ Various aspects of isolation are emphasised through characters such as Eilis <sup>with models</sup> ~~representing~~ isolation through migration, Miss Lacey, showing isolation which women faced in the 50's, the Irish workers <sup>at the Christmas</sup> Party who are geographically and emotionally isolated, and Rose, who is isolated in Enniscorthy with no hopes of escape.

**Comment:** Observe how the candidate has set out to place the idea of isolation in relation to relevant contextual factors.

Question 10, on the process of growing up, lent itself to a strong focus on Eilis and the ways in which she develops over the course of the novel. Much use was made of the sea voyage – it would have been good to see a fuller consideration of the symbolism the writer employs here – as well as Eilis' return to Enniscorthy and her continued lack of maturity relating to Jim and Tony. Some detailed responses were offered with candidates commenting on the role of the Catholic Church and the part it plays in protecting and not

allowing Eilis to mature. There was a marked tendency in weaker responses to deal with the characters and events of the novel as if they were real. Centres are encouraged to develop candidates' abilities to discuss the ways in which the characters and events of the novel are constructed and to spend time analysing this.

### **Questions 11 & 12: *Purple Hibiscus* (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie)**

Question 11 focused on the presentation of hostile environments. This lent itself to discussing both the microcosm of Kambili's household and the macrocosm of Nigeria. Of the responses seen, most centred on Kambili's home, with a later comparison to the freedom of Nsukka. Students with a more confident handling of contexts presented convincing evaluations of how Nigeria at the time of the novel was hostile to many, and the Achike home was read as a microcosm of this. The best responses also interrogated the relative freedom of Ifeoma and her household. There was a sense that elements of crafting and AO2 analysis were treated with a broad brush.

Question 12, the more popular question on *Purple Hibiscus*, was about the presentation of acts of rebellion. Again, this question was accessible, and candidates offered consideration of a variety of characters' acts of rebellion – including Beatrice, Jaja, Ifeoma, Eugene, Ade Coker and Kambili. Some thoughtful responses were encountered, including a response critical of the timidity of Kambili's development, even at the end of the novel. Stronger characters noted the parallels between the individual and society but did not always provide detailed analysis in response to AO2. Weaker responses tended to revert to straightforward character analysis.

### **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. It has been pleasing to see that centres have responded well to the need to prepare candidates for AO3. Examples were still seen of responses that made little or no use of contextual factors. Performance in

this regard, however, has improved – especially in relation to *Life of Pi* and *Brooklyn*. Centres are reminded that 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 in a large number of cases need to work on their exploration of AO2 – the ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts. This was a consistently weaker element of many responses in this series. Word level analysis – especially when used on lengthy works of prose fiction – is not sufficient. Candidates need to be prepared to discuss a variety of the methods their selected writers are employing and the kinds of effects they achieve.

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.