



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2021

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level
In English Literature (WET01)
Unit 01: Post 2000 Poetry and Prose

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Introduction

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Standard Introduction

For this unit, WET01, the open book examination is two 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* 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* or *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 2021 (2101) paper and performance

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

In what has been a very difficult and unpredictable year globally, the number of entries was pleasing. We are hopeful that candidate numbers will continue to increase in coming series. As centres have become more experienced with the demands of the specification, the quality of candidates' responses has continued to improve as candidates are dealing with the range of Assessment Objectives, and we have been pleased to see how effectively candidates were prepared even under the exceptional circumstances and challenges this year has presented.

For this series we saw students offering responses on all of the texts, and the full range of marks was awarded.

For Section A, Post-2000 Poetry, some responses were a little disappointing as students did not analyse in sufficient depth and detail the connections between the nominated poem and the poem of their own choice, tending at times to spend too long discussing their selected poem at the expense of analysing the set poem. It is important to note that AO4 is assessed in this section of the examination. Some candidates explored possible metaphorical interpretations of the poems and the methods the poets had employed without first engaging in a consideration of the poems as a whole and what they might mean. Candidates would benefit from offering an exploration of the potential overall meanings of the poems they are writing about before moving on and delving deeper for metaphorical meanings and offering interpretations. It is also most important that candidates take time to consider the ways in which the poems, their potential meanings and their methods can be connected.

In Section B, the most popular prose text studied section was *The Kite Runner* (Questions 3 and 4) and the second most popular *Purple Hibiscus Tiger* (Questions 11 and 12). Many responses gained marks in the top two levels although, at times, candidates did not sufficiently cover all assessment objectives (notably AO3) thus preventing candidates receiving marks at the top of a particular level. There were some candidates who did not consider context at all and others who did not consider the variety of ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts (such as, but not limited to, writers' use of the language, structure and form of the texts). In some cases, candidates had evidently spent most of their time in answering Section A at the expense of their Section B responses. A number of candidates had also provided word counts for their answers. Candidates are to be advised that counting words in the exam context is not a good use of time.

There is still some evidence of responses that are not as well developed or as fluently and accurately written as would be expected at this level. Some responses were very brief and tended to be narrative in nature rather than exploring the meanings of the texts. The specification states that candidates are required to communicate fluently, accurately and effectively their knowledge, understanding and critical evaluation of texts.

For the Post-2000 Prose section, many candidates were well prepared and met the demands of the questions they answered across the Assessment Objectives. Some fell short on drawing out meaning, making short, surface comments on quotations rather than exploring more thoroughly the ways in which language and a variety of other methods are

used to forge meaning. There were also many responses that lacked the expected knowledge of the terminology, concepts and approaches to qualify for marks in the higher levels. This said, there were also examples of excellently crafted responses that were a joy to read.

Marks are always applied positively, but in order to qualify for marks in higher levels, candidates should be able to identify and explore how attitudes and values are expressed in texts and use literary critical concepts and terminology with understanding and discrimination.

Detailed Commentary on individual questions

Section A: Post-2000 Poetry

Question 1

This poetry question asking for an exploration of movement was not so popular as Question 2 although chosen by a fair number of candidates. The poem 'Look We Have Coming to Dover!' was compared to a wide variety of other poems in the anthology. These were 'The Map-Woman', 'The Furthest Distance I've Travelled', 'The Deliverer', 'The Fox in the National Museum of Wales', 'Ode on a Grayson Perry Urn' and 'An Easy Passage'. The most popular choice of poem was 'You Shiva and my Mum'. Very few candidates commented on the quotation from Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' although many noticed the grammatically incorrect title and the unusual and made-up vocabulary in the poem. There are various types of movement- physical, emotional, social and cultural and although many candidates focused on the physical movement written by the poet, there were others who thought about the word 'movement' and were able to offer interesting and thoughtful ideas thus adding depth to their argument. Candidates understood the tone of the poem and brought out the pathos of the immigrants as they crossed by boat to Dover. Fewer comments were offered on the flow of the poem created by the enjambment and free verse stanzas.

Question 2

This question was the more popular of the two and asked for an exploration of connection in 'Genetics' and one other poem of choice. Again, this poem was compared to a wide variety of other poems including 'Effects', 'Out of the Bag', 'The Deliverer', 'Eat Me' and 'The Map-Woman'. The most popular choices were 'Material', 'Inheritance', 'To My Nine-Year-Old Self' and 'Please Hold'. A useful starting point would have been to consider the title and see whether it reflected the ideas in the poem. A few candidates recognised that this poem was in the form of a villanelle with a particular form and structure. Even if the form was not known to the candidate, the particular rhyming pattern and the circular form could have been noted and was by a number of candidates who wrote how theme and structure were interlaced. Candidates grasped an understanding of the connections that were being made in the poem and many successfully linked this theme to the poem of their choice. Some particularly successful answers looked at comparisons between 'Genetics' and 'Inheritance' or 'Please Hold'.

General Observations on Section A

1. It is recommended that candidates show they understand the poems they are writing about as a whole before proceeding to detailed analysis. It is also important for them to explain with clarity how the poems they are writing about connect 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 also need to show knowledge and understanding of a range of ways in which poets use language, form and structure in order to shape meaning.
3. It is recommended that centres continue to make use of the Sample Assessment Materials. Looking carefully at past papers and mark schemes for this paper will help them to become increasingly familiar with the assessment requirements. The mark grids demonstrate how candidates can progress from one level to the next. For Level 4 and above, responses need to be discriminating, critical and evaluative. Close analysis should be controlled and candidates should be able to identify and provide examples of the nuances and subtleties of the writer's craft.

The Post-2000 Poetry questions assess Assessment Objectives (AOs) 1, 2 and 4:

AO1: Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression.

AO2: Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts.

AO4: Explore connections across literary texts

Context is not assessed in Section A of the paper.

Section B: Post-2000 Prose

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

Question 3

The question, which was the more popular of the two on *The Kite Runner*, considered the presentation of loss in the novel and there was plenty of room for scope. Some candidates produced very promising answers by focusing on the loss in response to death, the loss of identity and the loss of the way of life, and offered relevant and thoughtful examples. Other candidates focused too much on one particular incident or character, such as the loss shown between Amir and Hassan after the rape scene or Amir and Baba's relationship to one another. The question demanded an exploration of the theme of loss. There were some commendable efforts to include examples of the writer's craft but many candidates did not offer thoughts on the structure of the novel, choosing to offer a more character-based argument.

Question 4

This question which referred to the presentation of truth, was not so popular but still presented ample opportunity for the candidate to write widely on the theme. An obvious area was of being true to oneself and many candidates focused on Baba's dilemma regarding Hassan. Hassan's innate honesty was in stark contrast to his father who could not admit parentage due to the Afghani culture. Other candidates also focused on Sohrab and the double standards shown by men in Afghani culture. A number of candidates chose to expand the ideas of truth by deception and political conceptions of truth. As noted previously, the writer's craft was not always appreciated.

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

Questions 5 & 6

Question 5 proved more popular than Question 6. Candidates displayed a sound knowledge of the text and were able to consider how Pi managed to survive his extreme circumstances. Most candidates considered the importance of religion and Pi's ingenuity in facing his fears but did not always include sufficient context. Relatively few candidates focused on the structure of a post-modernist story and its use of alternative narratives. Those that did, offered a more sophisticated approach. Very few candidates answered Question 6 but acknowledged Pi's perspective on religions and his independence of thought.

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

Questions 7 & 8

Relatively few candidates answered these questions. All candidates displayed a sound knowledge of the text with some candidates offering very relevant detail on the caste system. This was particularly useful when answering Question 8 which called for an exploration of the harsh reality of life in India. Adiga's use of metaphors (the Darkness and The Rooster Coop) was noted but candidates could have made more of the linguistic features offered in the novel, such as Balram's narrative voice and colourful use of language as well as the structure.

***Brooklyn* (Colm Tóibín)**

Question 9.

Candidates displayed a good focus on the question and showed awareness of Irish family life post-war. Generally, most focused on the relationship between Eilis, Rose and their mother in Ireland. There were some good efforts to extend this to alternative families in the United States by a few candidates. It would be useful to explore the concept of family as the way that Father Flood acted as a surrogate father for the Irish community in Brooklyn.

Question 10

As with Question 9, all candidates displayed a sound knowledge of the text. It was pleasing to see how some candidates explored the ideas of loss in the text. As well as considering the loss of family and friends (losing Rose, her mother and Jim at the beginning of the text), some candidates also considered Eilis' loss of values and innocence by going to the United States. She may have gained in confidence and opinions, but she has lost her honesty by not revealing her marriage to Tony when she returns to Ireland. More could have been

made of the way in which Toibin structured the novel and the style in which it was presented.

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

Question 11

This question was the less popular of the two. Most candidates displayed a sound knowledge of the text and had a good grasp of context, such as knowledge of the political system and an understanding of the differences between western religion and traditionalism. There was also an awareness of characters in the novel representing tradition and change. More consideration could be given to the nuances and style of the text, such as the use of colloquial words and the difference in speech by Papa and his father. This also applies to Question 12.

Question 12

This was the more popular question of the two. Again, candidates displayed a sound knowledge of text and context. There tended to be a focus on Kambili and her brother although some candidates looked at the religious dilemma for Father Armadi who was torn between his priesthood traditions and Nigerian traditions.

General Observations on Section B

1. Marks at all levels were awarded for all questions. Responses ranged from very brief answers providing surface readings of texts or a narrative overview through to very impressive critical and evaluative essays which were a delight to read. On the whole, centres are to be congratulated for preparing their students so thoroughly for the examination.
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. Some candidates, however, did not explore all AOs (especially AO3). There was a range of ability displayed in exploring the ways in which meanings are shaped in prose texts, but candidates performing in the lower levels demonstrated more limited ability to explore the craft of the texts they had 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 in discussing writers' use of language that candidates demonstrate how specific examples they choose for analysis relate more broadly to what is happening in the texts they have studied – i.e. that they demonstrate that these are not isolated examples.
3. It is important for centres to remember that the bullet points in the mark grid reflect the requirements of the AOs and how effectively these are met at each level. Markers award marks according to a 'best fit' principle. Where candidates do not deal equally effectively with all of the AOs, marks are adjusted upwards and downwards within and across levels in order to reflect fairly the balance of candidates' achievements. Candidates should remember that they need to address contexts and that both contexts of production and of reception are useful. Contexts, however, must be used in a consistent and formative way in relation to argument and should not appear simply as 'bolted on' information. More effective

candidates successfully embed contextual material and, where appropriate, include evidence of wider reading, such as the views of critics.

4. The most successful responses in this section of the examination addressed the AOs in a controlled and assimilated fashion. Students achieving the best marks skilfully developed arguments relevant to the questions they had opted to answer and conveyed an overview of the text as a whole. They also employed a variety of techniques to explore meaning analytically, incorporating considered discussion of contexts and the ways in which these affect candidates' readings of the texts.
5. Less effective responses covered the AOs but without the cohesion and consistency required at the higher levels. Many students conveyed a good working knowledge of the texts and their contexts but tended to 'bolt on' contextual material rather than demonstrating how it affected and helped to shape readings of text. When writing about how meanings are shaped in texts, candidates tended to explore specific examples without making wider reference to how their selections were illustrative of wider aspects of texts. As has been previously advised, centres could assist candidates by providing them with an understanding of the novel as a genre:
 - What is a novel?
 - How do novels work?
 - What narrative and other methods do writers of prose fiction employ?
 - How does use of language differ in the novel to in other genres?

Such insights would assist students in relation to both AO2 and AO3.

6. As noted above, some candidates had left insufficient time to complete their responses to Section B having spent the bulk of their energies on Section A. This is not advisable as both sections of the examination carry equal marks.

Paper Summary

Performance of this paper has been very pleasing and some excellent responses have been seen. Many candidates have gained marks in the top two levels and centres should be congratulated in preparing their candidates so well.

Based on performance on this paper, centres and candidates are offered the following advice for their future success:

- address the AOs for the relevant sections of the paper and use mark schemes and past papers to guide teaching
- encourage candidates to use a range of literary concepts and terminology to identify ways in which writers create meaning; discuss the effect of these techniques might have upon readers
- demonstrate awareness that readers are individuals – not all readers will see things in the same way; develop language to reflect what readers may (or may not) feel or think or understand
- for Section A, Post-2000 Poetry, encourage candidates to demonstrate a basic overarching understanding of the poems they are writing about before launching into analysis
- for Section B, Post-2000 Prose, ensure that candidates make appropriate references to contextual materials when writing about the chosen novels

- context is not simply writing about history but can relate to a whole series of factors – political, social, cultural, etc – that influence both the writer and the reader. It is important to remember that genre (the novel) is also a context and there is potentially much that candidates might say about this in relation to their selected texts. Context should be integrated and linked to the ideas and points being made, not simply bolted on as additional information – such bolt-on context does little to contribute to the creation of meaning.
- avoid narrative re-telling of the texts chosen for Section B. Narrative approaches are rarely successful and are typical of performance in the lower levels.
- read the exact wording of the question carefully and answer this question, rather than one practised before the exam.

Thank you,

Principal Examiner
(IAL English Literature WET 01)
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Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:
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