



Pearson
Edexcel

Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

November 2020

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level
In English Literature (9ET0 02)
Paper 2: Prose

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Introduction

This was an unusual exam series taken in exceptional circumstances. Knowing that students have faced many challenges this year, it was heartening to read exam answers which really showed the hard work and dedication that has been put into their studies. Students and teachers should be very proud of their achievements under very difficult conditions.

As expected, a relatively small number of students sat the exam paper, meaning that several questions received no, or very few responses.

Examiners noted that the range of marks awarded was slightly compressed; few marks were awarded at the very top of level 5, and far fewer at the lower end of level 2 than might be expected. No responses in level 1 were seen, suggesting that those who entered for this exam had been well prepared and knew what the requirements of the questions were. This is likely to be a reflection of the unusual cohort of students sitting this exam, and perhaps also of the fact that these students' education has been disrupted; the lack of face-to-face teaching and focused exam preparation mean they may not have had recent timed exam practice or reminders of the assessment criteria.

When compared to previous exam series, there seemed to be a higher proportion of students who did not meet the requirements of all four of the assessment objectives. This was particularly evident with A02, where examiners commented that some answers were not focusing sufficiently on the writers' craft, or the ways in which writers had shaped meanings in their novels. A03 was also rather thinly addressed in places, with either very little contextual detail discussed, a surprisingly high level of incorrect contextual detail, or limited attempt to make the contextual factors discussed relevant to the specific question being asked. A01 was generally well addressed, although some students did not address the question directly and appeared to be relying on previously prepared essays which did not actually answer the questions posed.

There were very few or no responses seen for questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 12. Only the questions on Science and Society, The Supernatural and Women and Society had substantial numbers of answers.

Question 7

Question 7 asked students to explore the ways in which writers make use of symbolism. The focus of the question naturally led to answers with a strong focus on the writer's craft, and a wide variety of different symbolic elements were discussed across the four texts, from character and setting to colour, childbirth, science and religious imagery. Some students struggled to make links to relevant contextual factors affecting the writers' use of symbolism, although there were some excellent responses looking at the links between Romanticism and Shelley's symbolic use of the natural world, and Atwood's explorations of feminism and women's rights through symbolic names, costumes and settings. The best answers were able to put forward a clear argument about the broader themes and issues the writers were exploring through their use of symbolism and to go beyond simply listing instances of symbolism in the novels.

Question 8

Question 8 focused on the ways writers present the roles individuals play in society. This was the more popular of the two questions in the Science and Society theme. Some students had difficulty in formulating an overall argument about the roles played by individuals. Weaker answers tended to focus on one or two characters and their characterisation, rather than considering their importance to the society being depicted and the role they represented within society. Better responses considered how characters were products of their societies, as well as the writers' intentions in crafting these characters. There was a distinct lack of textual support and discussion of the writers' methods in many of these answers, with much unsupported assertion.

Question 10

Question 10 asked students to compare how their writers presented desire as a theme. The question was on the whole very well answered, with the pairing of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Dracula* being very successful in terms of comparisons and context. There was some excellent discussion of Victorian social norms and the interplay between desire and transgression, as well as consideration of the role of hedonism and aestheticism in the late 1800s. Some answers focused exclusively (and often very fruitfully) on sexual desires, while others considered desire on broader terms, for example the desire for social advancement in *The Little Stranger* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, or for safety and security in *Beloved*. The best answers were conceptual in nature, considering the ways in which desire was often seen as taboo, and the moral consequences of either succumbing to or resisting desires.

Question 11

Question 11 focused on the ways in which writers explore social status. There were some very interesting responses on class, gender and power, the better responses considering aspects such as the role of the authorial voice in conveying ideas about social status. Less successful answers tended to make sweeping generalisations about class inequality in each novel, without much nuance, for example characterising Heathcliff as 'lower class' without

acknowledging his ability to cross class boundaries. Many students argued that class and gender went hand in hand to oppress the female characters in the novels, and while this often led to interesting discussions, occasionally these essays lost focus on the actual question. Some read like previously prepared essays on gender or the presentation of women in the novels which had been hastily repurposed, and these tended to be the least successful answers.

Paper summary

Based on their performance in this paper, students are offered the following advice:

- Make sure you are aware of the Assessment Objectives; these are all referred to in the question and are equally important.
- Remember to include relevant contextual points, which help you to develop your answer to the question
- When analysing quotes, make sure you are discussing the writers' craft and the ways that meanings are shaped in as much detail as you can
- As part of your preparation for the exam, practise planning and writing in timed conditions so that you know how much you can do in the time
- Make sure your introduction and conclusion are focused on the question, and that they set up your overall argument.

