



Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2019

Pearson Edexcel IAL
In English Literature (WET02)
Unit 2: Drama

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Introduction

Overall, the work done in this series represents a modest improvement on that seen in the comparable 1801 series, with marginally more candidates achieving both the 'A' grade and 'E' grade this time. Answers tended to be slightly fuller, and contextualisation's continued to be largely relevant to the specifics of the questions asked, in comparison to 1801.

Section A

Othello remains the most popular text choice, with over 80% of the small cohort choosing this text. The remaining entries opted in roughly equal numbers for *She Stoops to Conquer* and *Twelfth Night*. There were a small number of entries attempting *Doctor Faustus*, and no entries for *The Rover*.

It is again pleasing to note that following the observation, in the report on the 1701 series that no candidates had referred to a live or filmed production a number of students in 1901 made specific reference to a variety of film interpretations of the text. A word of caution however to candidates referring to film: sometimes the films are being treated as merely mimetic or faithful staging's of the printed text, simply to describe or authenticate details of plot or character. A preferable approach would be to engage with the directors' interpretations of the text in their film versions: in this way you will be obtaining AO5 ('Alternative Interpretations') credit also. A comparison of the printed text with two very different film or stage versions is likeliest to reveal differences of approach. There are now ample opportunities online to view filmed staging's of several of the set plays for WET02, and it is advisable where possible for candidates to encounter such productions, in either a live or mediated setting.

Question 9 proved to be the overwhelmingly popular choice of Othello candidates. Most answers included the predictable set piece scenes and the 'green-eyed monster' passage was widely cited. But other approaches worked well: Desdemona is the object of Brabantio's jealousy as well as Othello's; Iago's bitterness at the preferment of Cassio also lent itself to relevant discussion.

Question 10 produced some disappointing work, in the sense that several able candidates underachieved due to not fully attending to all aspects of the question set. The task's assertion was "Despite his suffering, Othello learns nothing"; the injunction that follows was "In the light of this statement, explore Shakespeare's presentation of Othello". A significant number of candidates worked only on the second part of the injunction, producing very wide ranging answers on a variety of aspects of Shakespeare's presentation of the eponymous hero. What was not done, however, was to consider Shakespeare's presentation in the light of the statement preceding the injunction. The assertion directed students very specifically to deal with specific moments of suffering, particularly those at the end of the play, in which Othello experiences what Aristotle calls *anagnorisis*: a moment of realisation or learning for the tragic hero concerning their flaws and errors. Compared to *Macbeth* or *Lear*, Othello's *anagnorisis* is somewhat limited. The assertion is thus contestable – does he learn nothing at all? Or is it that he doesn't learn enough? Too many candidates neglected suffering and learning altogether, and while they were rewarded for their work on the presentation of Othello, scores were inevitably somewhat suppressed.

Of the handful of candidates choosing *Twelfth Night*, Questions 5 and 6 proved equally popular, and were done well on the whole. A good knowledge of clothing and its significance, both in the play and in early seventeenth-century society, was evident; Feste's role in the comedy was well handled.

Once again, the answers on Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* were remarkable for the depth of textual knowledge and a comparative neglect of context and alternative interpretations (AOs 3, 4 and 5). Answers to Questions 3 and 4 often demonstrated excellent, relevant knowledge of the text in fluent, controlled prose and thus achieved well on AOs 1 and 2, but the lack of AO3/4/5 contextualisation placed the achievement of high level 4 or level 5 scores out of the reach of these candidates. The vast majority of the answers to Questions 3 and 4 were a little brief, typically just three pages of written prose. (*Othello* answers, for comparison, were routinely four or more pages long).

Section B

The most popular text selection in Section B was, again, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Over 80% of the 1901 cohort opted for this text, with a much smaller number choosing *Death of a Salesman* and *Waiting for Godot*. One answer on each of *Top Girls* and *Raisin in the Sun* was seen. Most of the *Streetcar* answers were to Question 17, and were largely successful, analysing not simply the marriages but the way in which the presentation of the marriages proves intriguing for the audience (often making purposeful allusions to the film version.) Some candidates wrote considerably more on Stella and Stanley than on Blanche and Allan, but this tended to suppress the force of the obvious contrasts. The surprising contention that Blanche and Stella were married to each other proved, thankfully, to be an isolated case.

Approaches to the Assessment Objectives

As in 2018, while there was a good deal of successful work on AO3 in both Sections A and B, AO5 was comparatively neglected. Some candidates who did attempt to meet the AO5 criteria provided quotes from critics, but these quotes were not always relevant to the specific question asked. Relevance is vital for achieving a top Level answer. Another vital aspect of a high Level response is showing that the variant critical interpretations have assisted the formation of one's own judgement. To achieve a Level 5 score, candidates must do more than regurgitate critical opinions; they must also be, as the marking scheme states, "evaluative", and in terms of AO5 specifically, a candidate is expected to apply "a sustained evaluation of different interpretations and alternative readings of texts". This is achieved by the sophisticated application of alternative interpretations to illuminate the candidate's own critical position. Few candidates were able to show that they could use the information they had remembered to inform and illuminate their own personal response.

As in the 1801 series, most candidates made some attempt to engage with the AO1 and AO2 requirement to display knowledge and understanding of literary techniques and the writer's craft, using such terms as metaphor, simile, symbolism, tragedy, comedy, soliloquy; too often, however, such terms were used in what seemed to be pre-planned statements rather than as reflexive responses to the specific demands of the question asked. Centres are again advised to ensure candidates are adequately prepared to use relevant terminology in service of an answer to a specific question.

Paper Summary

Based on performance on this paper, future candidates are offered the following advice:

- Use a range of literary terminology to identify ways in which writers create meaning; discuss the effect of these techniques on the reader or audience.
- Remember that the texts you are studying are plays: demonstrate your knowledge of theatrical terminology and refer where possible and relevant to specific productions.
- Don't just copy out lots of contextual material or quotes from critics or reviewers or directors; make judicious selections from such sources to support what you are saying about the play, and tailor it to the precise terms of the question.
- Read the exact wording of the question carefully and answer this question, rather than one you practised before the exam. Look carefully at both the injunction and the assertion; you must always answer the injunction "in the light of" the assertion provided.
- Enjoy your writing and share your enthusiasm with the examiner.