Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2022

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level in English Literature (WET02)

Unit 2: Drama

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Introduction

The January 2022 series featured a relatively small cohort of candidates, although each of the texts were answered on. The paper was very similar in performance to previous series. There were no errors in the paper, no erratum notices and there were no enquiries from centres following the examination.

Examiners saw a range of responses, with the majority of candidates achieving Level 3. Very few responses achieved Level 5. A number of responses were restricted to Level 2 or below because of a narrative, generalised approached with overviews/introductions which mads no reference to the specifics of the question.

There was a good knowledge of contexts demonstrated, however candidates often did not discriminate in terms of which context was more relevant in supporting the idea they were exploring.

In terms of analysis, a number of responses did not get beyond fairly general comment on the writer's craft and thus did not have access to the higher levels on AO2 which requires evidence of clear and detailed understanding of how writers use language to make meaning in texts. The loose connections as to how the writer has created meaning resulted in rather generalised arguments, offering personal rather than analytical responses to the questions.

There was some effective use of other viewpoints, most often in the form of literary criticism. Where candidates engaged specifically with the point being made by the critic, and then linked it to their argument and a specific part of the text candidates accessed the top of Band 3 and into Band 4. As has been the case in previous full series, candidates tended to engage very generally with the context of the time, with "Shakespeare's audience was very religious" or "Shakespearian audiences believed women were weak", rather than developing this to be specific for a play and the question being addressed.

Overall, candidates who were most successful engaged with aspects of stagecraft and showed understanding that these are literary constructions. They also explored a range of interpretations, debating a thesis rather than setting out a definitive reading.

SECTION A: Pre-1900 Drama

Questions 1 and 2: The Rover
Only three responses to Question 1.

Questions 3 and 4: *She Stoops to Conquer*
A small number of candidates answered on Goldsmith's play and of those who did the majority chose Question 3 on Kate and the way she might inspire different audiences. Most candidates were able to offer relevant parts of the text and discuss how Kate could be seen as an inspiration. However, the majority of the answers were characterised by a more narrative than analytical style, often resulting in an extended discussion of modern/contemporary values rather than close analysis of the text.

Questions 5 and 6: *Twelfth Night*

An equal number of students answered on Q5, where the focus was on boundaries being crossed and on Q6, where the focus was on the dramatic function of disorder.

The majority of the responses for both questions were able to give clear examples of boundaries being crossed/disorder and there was some support from relevant contexts/critical readings. Those responses which accessed the top of Band 4/low Band 5 engaged with the question of the 'dramatic function' of disorder, highlighting the ideas that disorder allows Shakespeare to explore within the text.

Questions 7 and 8: *Doctor Faustus*

An almost equal number of students considered Q7, where the focus was on whether or not Dr Faustus is a play with universal ideas and Q8, which ask candidates to consider the presentation of different types of books. The majority of responses were high Level 2/low Level 3, with the discriminator being a well-planned and shaped argument rather than a list of the different types of books in the play or a list of Faustus' dilemmas and decisions. A number of responses were characterised by big chunks of text rather than the closer analysis of more considered examples. This led to a narrative tone in a number of the essays, often with a more colloquial tone rather than an academic register.

Questions 9 and 10: *Othello*

As in previous series *Othello* proved to be a popular text with centres. Question 9 saw the most responses, with candidates finding lots to write about with reference to deception and delusion in the play. The stronger responses argued that deception and delusion were interconnected in the drama – for example, Othello's delusion as a consequence of Iago's deception. There were also some interesting responses which considered Othello's levels of self-deception and delusion. As with Q9, Q10 produced a range of responses, from Level 2 to Level 4. A number of successful responses considered the representation of conflict in Shakespeare's use of settings. Some of the most successful answers to both questions underpinned their ideas with reference to more specific context. An example of this can be seen here, taken from the middle of a candidate's essay in response to Q9. Whilst the expression is not always completely clear the contextual reference is specific and relevant to the point being made.

> *"The loss of the handkerchief alludes to a loss of Desdemona's propriety. During the Elizabethan era, virginity was a prized property and commodity, likely under the influence of the virgin queen, Elizabeth the Great. The virginity of a woman was meant to enjoyed by their husband only, those who prove unable to protect their wife's propriety and sexual conduct were seen as cuckholds, unworthy of societal respect. The loss of the handkerchief builds on Othello's paranoia of social rejection…"*

Section B: Post-1900 Drama

Questions 11 and 12: *Top Girls*
There was a very small number of responses to the Churchill play. Q12 on secrecy was marginally more popular and there was some clear discussion on secrets, albeit with the tendency to list different examples of secrecy rather than engage with why these secrets are necessary.

Questions 13 and 14: *A Raisin in the Sun*
It was pleasing to see responses to Hansberry's drama in this series. Both questions elicited a range of responses, with the more successful answers demonstrating a more judicious approach to the choosing of context.

Questions 15 and 16: *Death of a Salesman*
Q16, on truth and lies in Miller's drama proved to be marginally more popular with candidates than Q15 which asked them to consider the presentation of families. The majority of candidates were able to engage with the ideas in the questions in a clear way. However, most answers were limited by a listing approach, where different examples of families/secrets and lies were highlighted.

Questions 17 and 18: *A Streetcar Named Desire*
Williams' play remains the most popular choice of text in Section B, with Q18 (on the influence of the past) proving to be the favourite. Particularly successful was the range of social contexts candidates were able to draw upon in addition to the usual examples (gender and class). Candidates should remain wary, however, of drawing too definite a conclusion when discussing Williams' own life and the impact that this had on the play. The most successful answers to Q18 moved past listing examples of past events which may still affect the characters and considered wider ideas about the dramatic function of the past in the drama. The start of one such response idea is detailed below:

> *"The past is used to establish character conflicts, and serves as a motive for the character of Stanley. Stanley's past is one of immigration and poverty, a lower class upbringing. His past, one furthest away from the comfort of wealth, establishes his envy for Blanche and tempts him to being about her destruction…"*

Questions 19 and 20: *Waiting For Godot*
Beckett's play attracted a small cohort of students this year, with equal numbers attempting Question 19 (language) and Question 20, which asked students to explore the idea that the world of Waiting for Godot is one which lacks sympathy and kindness. Answers were generally more successful when considering the ideas in Q20, as the some of the responses to Q19 were restricted to giving examples of the different types of language in the play, without linking this to wider, possibly contextual ideas. There were fewer contextual links made than in previous series, however the candidates who achieved Level 4 did so in part because they chose context judiciously and used it to develop their already well-planned argument.