Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel IAL

In English Literature (WET02)

Unit 2: Drama

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Introduction

The 1801 series is the third series since the adjustment to the distribution of assessment objectives and marks available for Section B. (The revised distribution is 25 marks for Section A, and 25 marks for Section B.) Much of the evidence from this series suggests that this redistribution has been widely and successfully implemented by centres.

Overall, the work done in this series represents a modest improvement on that seen in the comparable 1701 series: although there marginally fewer candidates achieving the 'A' grade, there was a small improvement in the percentage of candidates passing, and achieving grades 'C' and 'B'. Answers tended to be fuller, and contextualisations were on the whole more relevant to the specifics of the questions asked than in the 1701 series.

Section A

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

Question 9 proved to be the overwhelmingly popular choice of *Othello* candidates. More routine answers focused on Iago's important contributions to the plot of the play; better answers were able to link this dominance to Shakespeare's crafting of the character's distinctive voice in soliloquy, and in dialogue. The best answers tested the proposition in the question against generic conventions and theories of classical tragedy, usually to impressive effect.

It is 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 1801 made specific reference to recent London productions and 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 stagings 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 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 stagings 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.

Of the handful of candidates choosing *Twelfth Night*, Question 5, on Viola and identity, proved overwhelmingly popular. A good range of textual knowledge was martialled, and most candidates were aware of key contexts including acting conventions of Shakespeare's era, and the identity politics conjured by feminism and queer theory in politicsed readings of the plays.

Once again, the answers on Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* were remarkable for the depth of textual knowledge and the almost complete 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.

As in 2017, while there was a good deal of successful work on AO3 elsewhere in Section A, AO5 was comparatively neglected. Some candidates who did attempt to meet the AO5 criteria provided quotes from critics, but the evidence was 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 1701 and 1706 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.

Section B

The most popular text selection in Section B was, again, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Almost two-thirds of the 1801 cohort opted for this text, with a smaller number choosing *Death of a Salesman* and *Waiting for Godot*. No answers were seen on *Top Girls*, and only one on *Raisin in the Sun*.

Some excellent work was produced, and the best answers successfully integrated personal and critical responses, attending fully to the requirements of the question. Most candidates had a thorough knowledge of the plot of their chosen play, and key aspects of theme and characterisation, though relatively few were able to give a full sense of the dramatic qualities of the play, as a piece of staged theatre. It is to be hoped that access to filmed versions or mediated staging's of the set plays will be used more widely in future series – when such

mediations are read as *interpretations* of the text, rather than simply faithful renderings of the plot, candidates can also use this experience to inform their AO5 achievement.

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.
• Enjoy your writing and share your enthusiasm with the examiner.