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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2020

Pearson Edexcel IAL

In English Literature (WET02)

Unit 2: Drama

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Introduction

Overall, the work done in this series was of a closely comparable level to that seen in the January 2019 series, with similar numbers of candidates achieving both the 'A' grade and 'E' grade this time. Entry numbers were slightly higher than in the preceding series.

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*, *Doctor Faustus* and *Twelfth Night*. There were a small number of entries attempting *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 2001 made specific reference to a variety of film interpretations of the text. Responses on *Faustus* and *Twelfth Night* were very adept at scoring well on AO5 for their work in dissecting text, screen and stage interpretations, so long of course as the material presented was pertinent to the specific question asked (and it mostly was). Surprisingly, *Othello* was treated less fully in this regard. Most candidates now introduce film or stage adaptations as a way of engaging with the directors' interpretations of the texts. As previously advised, 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.

Othello remains the overwhelmingly popular choice. By a ratio of over 2:1, candidates opted for Q10 over Q9. Q10 asked candidates to focus on the presentation of marriage in the play. This was mostly done competently, but the ability to detect parallels between the marriages of Othello/Desdemona and Iago/Emilia proved to be a fairly reliable discriminator. Most candidates revealed their solid knowledge of the play by quoting aptly from the relevant scenes, though surprisingly few picked up on Iago's suspicions of Emilia's fidelity in an early soliloquy. Q9 was in some respects a more demanding question, and those who were able to perform a detailed study of speech patterns and discourse

analysis scored highly. Candidates without this knowledge tended to flounder, finding themselves focusing on what is said rather than how it is said, which is what the question explicitly demanded. Answers which were anchored in a specific stage or screen production, paying careful attention to the delivery of key soliloquies and passages of dialogue also tended to do well. The Faustus questions (Q7 and Q8) and Twelfth Night (Q5 and Q6) performed equivalently well. Both answers saw a significant number of candidates achieving well on AO5 in their discussions of live or screened productions.

Section B

The Tennessee Williams play was, once again, much the most popular choice of text, though across all texts, AO3 and AO5 achievement was on balance less impressive in Section B than in Section A. Although these plays are more recent, each has generated a substantial body of accessible critical material, and there have been several recent productions of most of them. The questions on narrative time in *Death of a Salesman*, and stage directions in *A Streetcar Named Desire* produced work that was particularly attentive to dramatic form, though the questions did of course demand this. Q18 on *Streetcar*, on various types of difference, produced some fantastic and highly varied work: many answers moved beyond identity politics of race, class and gender to embrace a plethora of differences, including differing attitudes to domesticity, differing attitudes to work, and differing concepts of love, romance and desire.

Approaches to the Assessment Objectives

As in the 1801 and 1901 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 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.

Thank you,

Principal Examiner

(IAL English Literature WET02_01)

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