Pearson Edexcel

Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2025

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level in English Literature (WET02)
Unit 2: Drama

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Introduction

The January 2025 series featured a relatively small cohort of candidates, although most 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.

The responses in this series ranged from Level 1 to Level 5, with a significant number of candidates achieving Level 3 and above with clear responses and well-planned arguments. At Level 2, responses tended to be much more general, recounting irrelevant facts about the plays and offering statements about plot points/character rather than ideas/a detailed argument. As highlighted in previous reports, candidates would be best advised to take the time to plan their responses, developing lines of argument which directly answer the question and engage with the critical viewpoint given.

In terms of analysis, there was some useful discussion of these texts as a play and the writers' use of dramatic techniques. However, there were a significant number of candidates who described the events of the play rather than analysed the writers' choices, therefore limiting the Level achieved. Candidates who saw the characters as constructs, consciously created by the playwrights, also tended to access the higher levels as their responses were more focused on writers' choices rather than talking about the characters as real people.

When considering the significance of different contexts on the plays, candidates were able to embed relevant references. To access the higher levels, candidates need to consider the idea of 'illumination'; what ideas of the text does the consideration of context illuminate? How does context *add* to meaning? When engaging with different critics there was some evidence of some useful discussion and integration. Candidates would be best advised to 'dig deep' on the criticism used and link the idea to a specific part of the play if possible.

SECTION A: Pre-1900 Drama

QUESTIONS 1 and 2: THE ROVER

No responses were seen.

QUESTIONS 3 and 4: SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER

Very few candidates answered on Goldsmith's text. Whilst there was evidence that the candidates knew the text well and could highlight the examples of comedy, a number struggled to engage with how the comedy highlighted the drama's 'social commentary'.

QUESTIONS 5 and 6: TWELFTH NIGHT

Q06 was the more popular option, with candidates engaging with ideas about 'women's power'. There were some confident responses here, with Viola the main focus in many of them. There were effective AO2 remarks on the ambiguities of Viola's references to gender, and contextual factors, both dramatic and social, were on the whole informed and relevant. One or two thoughtful candidates found the question condescending to women, pointing out that they seem to have most of the power in the play regardless of disguise.

QUESTIONS 7 and 8: DOCTOR FAUSTUS

Q07, on the conflict between free will and fate, proved to the more popular of the two options. On the whole, candidates took the time to plan carefully and therefore delivered considered and generally controlled responses which weighed up the two sides of the critical statement. As in previous series there was a tendency to focus on contextual factors and a number of responses could have been strengthened with consideration of Marlowe's use of dramatic techniques.

QUESTIONS 9 and 10: OTHELLO

Q09 provided candidates with a debate to engage with and most did so effectively. Most candidates recognised that the terms of the question were not mutually exclusive, that it is Iago's diabolically intelligent insight into the insecurities of others that allows his cunning to work so effectively, and that all possible motives for his plan are linked to some insecurity of his own. Both race and gender had a high profile, as did reputation and honour, and all were well supported. There was effective and detailed AO2 comment, particularly on Othello's descent from grand verse to gibbering prose, and, structurally, his delayed appearance at the beginning of the play.

Perhaps surprisingly, significantly fewer candidates chose Q10 which focused on an audience's opinions of Desdemona. Desdemona's loyalty and virtues were fully supported and there were many detailed examinations of the way she stands up to her father. Others questioned her naivete in pressing Cassio's case so relentlessly, and cast doubt on her wisdom in going to Cyprus at all. Most candidates considered Desdemona's death, with some offering a number of different interpretations of her submission to her murder and her loyalty to her murderer. In cases such as this, where interpretations are varied and contentious, candidates should be assured that setting out some of the options can achieve a good mark.

Section B: Post-1900 Drama

QUESTIONS 11 and 12: TOP GIRLS

Very few candidates answered on this play.

QUESTIONS 13 and 14: A RAISIN IN THE SUN

Very few candidates answered on this play.

QUESTIONS 15 and 16: DEATH OF A SALESMAN

Q15 proved to be the more popular choice here, with candidates able to recite different examples of loyalty (or lack of it) in Miller's play. Some responses were limited by the fact that they were lists of different plot points in the play and didn't really consider the critical statement or attempt to offer a counter argument to it. As in previous series, context was embedded well and used to illuminate ideas for the most part.

QUESTIONS 17 and 18: A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

With reference to Q17 various prejudices were explored: racial, social, sexual, cultural. All were well supported, and there was thoughtful AO2 comment on the means by which Williams seeks to elucidate, intensify and complicate them.
Q18 proved to be an interesting one, with candidates perhaps a little surprised by the critical statement. Those who took the time to plan and think through their argument produced some thoughtful responses where, despite disagreeing in general with the idea that Stanley and Blanche share some similarities, they were able to see connections and explore them. Candidates should be encouraged to really think through their responses and take the time to plan, even if (or perhaps especially) they disagree with the view in the statement. When candidates did do this, there were a number of interesting AO2 discussions as to how Williams creates parallels between the two in language and stagecraft.

QUESTIONS 19 and 20: WAITING FOR GODOT

Both questions on Beckett's play proved to be equally popular. Unfortunately, many candidates got so entangled in ideas behind the play that they did not exemplify by reference to words and actions in the play. This led to very narrative responses with sections of context added in an attempt to illuminate the ideas being explored.

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