

Principal Moderator Feedback

January 2011

GCE

GCE English Literature (6ET02)

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The fifth series of this unit saw some very competent and confident analysis of a range of drama texts and plenty of realistic sounding, yet very imaginative, critical work by candidates. Most centres are fully engaging with the specification for the coursework folder and its potential for encouraging candidates' best work. Most are rising fully to the challenges of a unit where all four assessment objectives are assessed.

There were, however, signs that some centres had not recognised the importance of the weighting of the assessment objectives. There were centres where candidates had chosen tasks that did not allow them fully to access all the relevant assessment objectives. In the Explorative Study, this was mainly because they had not taken full account of the demands of Assessment Objective 3, which alone accounts for almost half the marks of the entire coursework folder. In the Creative Critical Response it was either because a context (intended audience, purpose and form) was not established for their writing where the candidate's choice and manipulation of form and register are central to the assessment of this piece or where there was some confusion with regard to the 'creative' element of the piece. Again, such confusion seems to have arisen because the assessment objectives had not been fully noted.

Most candidates adhere to the word count, although a few Creative Critical Responses are overly long. Centres should make candidates aware that, after around 500 words, the responses tend to lose their point and register. It also reduces the potential length of the Explorative Study. Disappointingly, some candidates still do not include a cumulative word count as required by the specification.

Although the vast majority of centres had put enormous effort into annotating the candidates' work, there were some who had clearly not recognised the importance of annotation in the moderating process. Some work was so well-annotated that the reasons for awarding the marks were crystal clear; others were much less clear, and a minority had no comments at all, or had simply written the numbers of assessment objectives in the margins of the candidates' work. Often the comments on candidates' work are clearly intended for the candidate rather than a moderator.

Explorative Study

Texts traditionally studied at this level - such as *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Hamlet*, *Dr Faustus* and *The Duchess of Malfi* - continue to be popular for the Explorative Study, but some centres are successfully combining less familiar texts, ranging across the 1300 to 1800 period, such as *Everyman*, *The Rover*, *The Changeling*, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, and *The Country Wife* with a range of Shakespeare plays.

Assessment Objective 3 is the most heavily-weighted on the Explorative Study but, as one examiner put it, 'this continues to be the stumbling block for some candidates.' Although most candidates made links between texts central, there were a number who dealt with texts almost entirely separately, with a lengthy section on one play followed by another, or often a shorter section on the other with a few minimalist connections made. Other candidates made very little reference to the second play making it hard for them to sustain a meaningful comparison between the two.

There is a tendency to ignore the second part of AO3, the 'informed by interpretations of other readers' part. It may be that because it follows the 'connections and comparisons' in the assessment criteria a significant number of candidates think that it was less important. Many candidates included lots of quotes

from critics but failed entirely to engage with these or to use them as the basis of further argument. Argument is very much dependent on the way task titles are phrased. For example, 'Juliet Dusinberre has suggested that Shakespeare was a staunch feminist who secretly mocked social conventions. In the light of this, how far can we argue that this was his original intention rather than mere coincidence?' proved to be a far more fruitful title for candidates than 'Explore Shakespeare's presentation of women in these two plays.'

Creative Critical Response

Candidates continue to use the Creative Critical Response to experiment with style and to try to write in different formats. There were lots of interesting and engaging pieces, often showing confident handling of form and a lively critical approach. Topics ranged from a letter to The Guardian's theatre critic taking issue with his recent review of *Othello* to an extract from an interview with Al Pacino where he discusses his interpretation of a particular scene in *The Merchant of Venice*.

A few centres do not set clear contextual boundaries for candidates and as a result their responses failed to demonstrate the candidates' skills in handling register and manipulating form. Once again, the least effective pieces were lengthy reviews of performances with no specified target readership and no critical 'hook' with which to engage.

There remains also the problem identified in previous reports where candidates do not find a different voice for their Creative Critical Response with the result that they simply write another, shorter, essay. On the other hand a few centres have interpreted this piece as being a 'creative writing' exercise. Here candidates often lose sight of the play in finding a new voice. One moderator made this point: '...even when not writing a straight review, an objective critical standing back is required.' Directors' blogs and actors' notebooks will all be able to do this, but Lady Macbeth's account of the happenings in *Macbeth* will not. If she were in a one-woman show, however, retelling the story, and the Creative Critical Response were not her script but her notes and thoughts on the production - "tonight I'll play it cruel" - that would be different.

Comments on coursework

Explorative Study

AO1

The moral implications of this passage echo throughout the play as the struggle between divine and secular justice takes place. The complex nature of the relationships...and the near-tragedy the characters are faced with, do indeed satisfy the definition of a romantic comedy...

Moderator Comment:

To achieve the highest marks on this assessment objective, candidates must demonstrate wide knowledge and understanding of the texts (focus on only one scene, for instance, won't suffice) using appropriate terminology and accurate well-structured writing. There needs to be a sense of a structured argument and it is a good idea for candidates to spend time thinking carefully about their essay openings so that the direction of their argument is made clear early on to the reader.

AO2

...she appears to come back from being a statue; it is the ultimate 'coup de theatre.' Tension is built up as Paulina plays for time: 'O, patience! / The statue is but newly fixed, the colour's / Not dry.' It is a tough scene to work into a play (particularly for a 21st Century audience well-acquainted with the technical wizardry of contemporary cinema) and so it has to be fitted in smoothly to have the shocking effect Shakespeare intended to bring the play to a close... The almost complete silence on stage of Hermione and Leontes after this revelation conveys very effectively the overwhelming consequences of jealousy.

Moderator Comment:

This is a very good example of detailed analysis of language and structure, showing excellent understanding of how the dramatist manipulates these to make meaning. The candidate embeds fully comments about language and imagery into the main body of his argument. Above all, there is a real sense of the text as a piece of drama to be produced on stage - something many candidates forget when discussing their texts.

AO3

...These examples of tripling are similar, but by greeting the crowd as 'Friends', Antony manages to achieve a more emotive and intimate speech than Brutus - 'If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.' All of this supports Gill's view that "Antony's speech is aimed at the heart not the head." In the same way, Henry's soliloquy has the effect of revealing his inner emotions to the audience. Gill argues that "...a soliloquy...by the conventions of Elizabethan drama is always to be trusted." This is true here where the audience see Henry alone. However Johnston states that "this intense private glimpse into Henry's mind doesn't help...reveal anything significant about the man underneath." There may be some truth in this; nevertheless, the soliloquy does show the audience the stresses and strains felt by Henry which are not in evidence when he is around other people. He uses rhetorical questions - 'But poisoned flattery? - encouraging the audience's sympathy. Very much in the same way as Antony does...

Moderator Comment:

Note how this candidate manages to fulfil both elements of AO3. The two plays are clearly compared and the views of other readers are not simply cited but are pitted against one another and used to develop the candidate's argument. It is this analysis and exploration of interpretations by other readers that is required for the top bands on the assessment objective.

AO4

Scheming Cassius in Julius Caesar persuades the admirable Brutus to butcher Caesar. Likewise, in Henry V, Canterbury urges Henry to go to war against France. At court the audience observes Henry debating as to whether to wage war. Canterbury tells him: "Go, my dream lord, to your great-grandsire's tomb, from whom you claim; invoke his warlike spirit" - playing on Henry's sense of pride by mentioning his great ancestors. Shakespeare juxtaposes scenes i and ii, showing the audience that Canterbury's ulterior motive is to distract Henry from seizing the possessions of the Church. He explains to Ely, "It must be thought on. If it pass against us, we lose the better half of our possession." This juxtaposition can be seen to undermine Henry's idea of a 'just war.' However, under Salic law, the invasion of France would have

been legal and just. Indeed, the need for moral justification for invasion is still familiar to a modern audience: Tony Blair stated that, "Before we take the decision to go to war, (its) morality...should weigh heavily on our conscience because innocent people, as well as guilty, die"...

Moderator Comment:

Here the candidate uses his understanding of the contextual background of the plays, not only to sustain his comparison of them, but also to explore Shakespeare's dramatic craft. The key is that contextual knowledge is very well assimilated into the body of his argument and not a 'bolt on' reference.

Creative Critical Response

AO1

...at the same time Branagh loses none of Elsinore's incestuous intimacy...inside this wintry palace of huge marbled walls, roaring fires...

Moderator Comment:

In order to achieve the highest band on this objective, candidates must demonstrate clear awareness of register and audience and write persuasively in the chosen critical form. There is no point in adopting the role of theatre critic for The Times and then writing a review that is chatty, intimate and laced with colloquialisms. Equally, if the chosen form is an extract from a discussion on Woman's Hour, then the formal structure and vocabulary of an academic essay would be inappropriate.

AO4

For my money, Branagh does the verse much better than even Laurence Olivier, which is to say it springs spontaneously with natural energy and life. Any problem a modern audience might have with the metaphor-charged Elizabethan lingo disappears...

Moderator Comment:

High marks on this objective are awarded for presenting an effective, thoughtful interpretation of texts within their contexts with a clear awareness of how they are received. This candidate explores, and makes critical judgements about, interpretations of Shakespeare's text by two very different modern directors and, at the same time, shows an understanding of the changes in audience perceptions of the text over time. An appropriate e.g. - 'For my money...'; 'Elizabethan lingo...' etc.

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