

Moderators' Report/  
Principal Moderator Feedback

June 2011

GCE English Literature 6ET02

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## General overview

Most centres are now confident in task setting and in assessing their candidates' work on this unit. As a result there is evidence that many teachers are looking at ways to stretch and challenge their students by encouraging them to explore texts in new and interesting ways and to take some risks with critical pieces. All of which is, of course, excellent preparation for A2.

For the Explorative Study most candidates wrote coherently and were able to sustain a comparison between texts. Occasionally candidates wrote about one text followed by the second with a few comparisons made at the start and end but the majority were able to sustain an argument or point of view. More able candidates engaged with critical opinions and confidently disagreed with them or incorporated them in part into their own argument; less able candidates quoted an opinion - sometimes randomly, or irrelevantly - and moved on. Many incorporated a sense of debate. However, there were some candidates, despite the significant weighting of AO3 on this unit, who failed to meet the requirements for the second element of the objective (engaging with interpretations by other readers) and this obviously had an impact on the candidates' performance overall.

Popular Shakespeare titles this year included *Hamlet* and *Othello*, and thereafter *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *King Lear*, *Measure for Measure* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. For comparison candidates looked at *Dr Faustus*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The White Devil*, *The Revengers' Tragedy* and *The Rover*. Moderators saw some interesting pieces on *The Changeling* and *Titus Andronicus* and some effective pairings of *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* on the subject of 'outsiders'. Some opted to present arguments about feminist readings of the women in some of these texts, favourites being Lady Macbeth, Ophelia, Gertrude, Emilia, Desdemona, Hero and Beatrice.

As tends to be the case each year, there are a few centres where candidates produce what one might call 'template' essays. All the candidates in the centre use exactly the same essay title and produce very similar essays. The danger here is that the individual voice is not allowed to emerge and often very able candidates miss out on the opportunity to show moderators what they can do. Similarly, in a few cases, some very tired formulae emerge.

The Creative Critical Response was handled confidently by most candidates. Most understood what was required so that they were able to capture an appropriate register and had an appropriate sense of audience. Many were very persuasive and were written with enthusiasm and clear engagement with the text's critical reception by different audiences, including reviewers, directors, bloggers, actors – both real and imagined. Many were humorous and witty and used a range of rhetorical devices. There was a variety of approaches, ranging from letters to a newspaper, a critical review of a performance or film, an interview with an actor/director/the writer, an update for a television programme or performance, a phone-in with a writer/actor/director/ being the writer him/herself writing a diary/letters/a

blog/being interviewed/writing an examiner's report. Many candidates wrote with genuine flair and confidence and much of the writing was very entertaining.

Few candidates now exceed the suggested word limits. However, there were some centres where submissions were noticeably brief – particularly on the explorative study. Candidates should note that anything much below 2000 words on the study will usually mean that the texts have not been explored in enough depth to merit the very highest bands.

Each series there are some candidates who have neither proof-read their work, nor redrafted it, and problems with expression as well as with simple spelling, punctuation and grammar have not been eliminated. Candidates need to be reminded of the importance of proof-reading the coursework folder before submission.

### **Explorative Study**

Effective comparisons and connections need not be based on plot, theme or character. Some of the best Explorative Studies compare the plays in terms of structure - for example the use of sub-plot and language, with motifs and images. Or setting. There are many ways of connecting texts that can form the basis of an interesting argument and also allow you to integrate AO2 or AO4 in a coherent way.

To achieve the highest bands on AO3 you must avoid citing critics without engaging with their ideas, or simply adding a paragraph of critical comment as an afterthought. The best answers use critical views to help form their own judgements and interpretations. And don't forget that you can demonstrate engagement with critical interpretations by exploring performance of the plays too. Bear in mind that AO3 is the most heavily weighted of the assessment objectives.

### **Exemplar 1:**

**Here is an example of a candidate making use of various productions of plays to demonstrate good engagement with interpretations by other readers and to develop his own argument:**

*'Shakespeare uses spying and surveillance to develop the plot and direction of characters in Hamlet. After Ophelia's scene with Hamlet, Polonius says, 'How now Ophelia? You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet said, we heard it all,' which, Peter Holland argues, shows how Polonius is 'practising domestically what he implements nationally' – true in the Rory Kinnear production. However, in any production, the line shows the flippant nature of this fatherly approach which ironically adds to the serious tone of the play. The effects of Shakespeare's references to spying in Twelfth Night stand in contrast to those in Hamlet. For instance, when Maria instructs Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Fabian to '...observe him, for the love of mockery...' it becomes clear to the audience that the purpose of spying here is to be for entertainment and for comedy – reinforced by the use of 'mockery.' Directors in the past have taken this scene and added to the already comic*

*elements by disguising the characters in a variety of ingenious ways – for example in Kenneth Branagh’s production (1988) when all four hid behind a Christmas tree or in the Courtyard Theatre production (2007) when they freeze in positions pretending to look like trees or objects...This contrasts with Hamlet’s clear awareness of the surveillance that is going on around him. His comment to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern – ‘Denmark is a prison’ shows he understands that Claudius and Polonius are spying on him. Similarly his question to Ophelia - ‘Where is your father?’ - is often interpreted by directors to suggest a test of Ophelia’s loyalty. In Branagh’s 1996 film he has Hamlet push Ophelia’s face up against the two-way mirror which Polonius and Claudius are standing behind. The implications of the incident become significant in the audience’s appreciation of the plot as it begins to define whether Hamlet truly is mad or is playing a game of deception himself...’*

**Examiner Tip:**

To achieve high band marks for AO4 you need to demonstrate perceptive understanding of the effects of contextual factors and must make insightful comments on the perspectives of different audience over time. This means that you should avoid making sweeping generalisations about context and try always to link comments about context to the texts themselves.

**Examiner Comment:**

One examiner made the following points:

‘I saw some splendid response to context, with good use of authentic sources. Then there were the ‘Elizabethan audiences would have...’ or ‘all Elizabethan women were...’ There was often no distinction made between Elizabethan and Jacobean, and a lack of understanding that an Elizabethan audience would not have responded in a certain way to Paulina in *The Winter’s Tale*, because it was written in the reign of James and Elizabeth was dead...’

**Exemplar 2:**

**Here is an extract from a candidate’s Explorative Study in which she compares the writer’s attitudes to marriage in *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Country Wife*:**

*‘The general attitude of both plays towards marriage are negative and satirical, mocking the many mercenary unions. The majority of Wycherley’s husbands see their wives as opportunities to climb the social and economic ladder in the ‘trendy’ London society of the 1670’s, while Shakespeare uses Baptista – a man who is happy for his daughter to marry either the wealthy but idiotic Hortensio or the pretentious Gremio – to demonstrate how money is valued more highly than love. In Wycherley’s London, status was everything, especially to the narcissistic and shallow ‘fops’ he so fiercely satirises. Their superficial attitude towards marriage and their idolisation of money are reflected in Horner’s comment:*

*“Why would’st thou marry her (Mrs Pinchwife)? If she be ugly, ill-bred and silly, she must be rich then?”*

*and the sentiment is echoed by the roguish Petruchio:*

*“I’ve come to wive it wealthily in Padua, if wealthily then happily in Padua.”*

*Together these comments suggest that wives were only good for one thing and that Jacobean and Restoration societies both considered money to be essential for happiness...*

*... A more troubling revelation on *The Country Wife* is the apparent cruelty of Restoration marriages. At first Pinchwife's exaggerated possessiveness of his wife is portrayed humorously in his locking her away and pretending she has smallpox to deter visitors, but we later realise the full extent of his brutality. Once Horner has seduced the innocent Margery, her husband forces her to write an insulting letter to him, threatening to "write the word whore with this penknife' on her face if she does not comply. This incident demonstrates the competitive jealousy instilled by London life and strengthens the contrast between town and country. Wycherley wants us to enjoy the cuckolding on the sadistic Pinchwife and take pleasure in Margery's rebellious transformation from naïve country girl to surreptitious London wife...*

*...This misogyny is also found in *The Taming of the Shrew*, perhaps best displayed by the events that befall Katherina: from her neglected, unloving upbringing to an abusive courtship and marriage with the dangerous Petruchio, ending finally – after all her resistance- with her apparent submission to her husband's will. Unlike many Shakespearian comedies, where we assume that the wedded couples will live happily ever after, the focus in *The Taming of the Shrew* is on wedlock without romance and chivalry which makes it a more demanding piece of theatre. However, Shakespeare, perhaps realising the progressive nature of his play, disguised it in a 'play within a play' structure as well as setting it in Italy to make its events easier for his contemporary audience to digest...'*

#### **Examiner Comment:**

This candidate has moved beyond generalisations to detailed consideration of the society in which Wycherley was working. The candidate has used this understanding of context to go on to make some insightful comparisons with the Shakespeare text.

#### **Creative Critical Response**

It is important not to assume that this is a piece of creative writing. What is required is a critical response to a text, written in a style and register appropriate for the form you have chosen. You have to show a good understanding of various critical receptions of the play (real or imagined) and also demonstrate that you can manipulate tone and register with confidence and accuracy. Thus creative pieces – e.g. Cassio's obituary for Othello - are not appropriate because they don't explore the play's critical reception.

#### **Exemplar 3:**

**A pompous young English teacher shows off in an article for *Conference and Common Room* (HMC professional journal) reviewing the Filter Production of *Twelfth Night* at the Curve Theatre.**

*'Having sworn truth' that the whacky modernisation of Shakespeare is sacrilege, I had agreed to attend the filter production of Twelfth Night 'with such a suff'ring' leaving me wondering 'if it be worth stooping for.' The theatre was redolent of 'fresh and stainless youth' which didn't bode well for a comfortable evening's entertainment.*

*'My determinate voyage' led me to what I assumed were stage hands tidying up a completely disorganised stage but it was soon revealed that this was the cast, 'practising behaviour to his own shadow.' However, determined to 'make pleasure of...pains' I prepared myself for the universally recognised line from the 'noble duke in nature as in name' – 'if music be the food of love, play on.' Sadly, this was somewhat tainted as it came from the mouth of a thirty-something man, complete with beer belly. I felt my excitement for the Bard's masterpiece 'sicken and so die' – 'even so quickly may one catch the plague.'*

*'O when my eyes did see' the entry of Sir Toby, resplendent in full Elizabethan costume my hopes were lifted dramatically. 'An ordinary fool that has no more brain than a stone' would finally introduce – I thought – the Shakespeare that I knew and loved. Unfortunately this image was soon dashed when Belch, 'babbling drunkenness' produced a Special Brew and lived up to his comical name – on an all too regular basis.*

*The spirit of misrule was portrayed as the cast childishly and 'peevishly threw' foam balls at what I still thought to be Orsino's head (Orsino and Aguecheek only being differentiated by hat swaps) and brought a mood of both revelry and revolt into the theatre. Had I not been there myself 'I could condemn it as an improbable fiction', the atmosphere being 'as uncivil as strange.' Although this went against everything I believe theatre to stand for, it did mean that the children became more involved, as the proverbial cloak of 'boring' Shakespeare was hastily shaken off as the 'scoundrels and substractors' gallivanted on stage. Some children with 'fancies ...more giddy and unfirm' and being so 'excellently ignorant' of the traditional work of the Bard whispered that they were actually enjoying themselves.*

*However, while this was not my idea of a typical Elizabethan comedy, and while, in order to keep up with the plot it was necessary to keep a close eye on the characters' headgear, I found that I (embarrassingly, but increasingly) enjoyed 'some excellent jests' with 'eye-offending brine' streaming down my cheeks with laughter. The production was 'full of invention', tearing down the fourth wall and allowing us – not to fully understand or appreciate the niceties of Shakespeare's play – but to have been part of a most pleasurable evening's entertainment. Filer, 'now I am your fool'!*

#### **Examiner Comment:**

The task set here has given the candidate the opportunity to take on a voice and demonstrate her skills of language manipulation for a specific audience and purpose. The role of the 'pompous young English teacher' allows that and so the candidate can access the demands of both Assessment Objectives 1 and 4 much more easily than if she had simply written a review of the play. The task has also invited her to adopt a particular critical

stance - i.e. that of the disapproving Shakespeare 'purist' and again this allows her to access the highest bands on AO4 where candidates need to present a 'thoughtful interpretation of texts' ...'with a clear awareness of how they are received.'

**Examiner Tip:**

Try not to focus too much on acting and staging. It is quite legitimate to comment on the way an actor interprets a part, but often candidates spend too much time writing about the way actors mumbled their part, or the music was bad, or the stage was too dark. Don't allow this kind of comment to dominate because you will not be fulfilling the criteria for AO4. Also, the more detail you can give the moderator on where your critical piece is to be published, its purpose and the circumstances in which it is produced the more likely you are to be rewarded for using appropriate language and style.



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