

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2012

GCE English Literature (6ET02)
Explorations in Drama

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General Overview

The eighth series of this unit continued to produce some interesting and engaging analysis of drama texts and plenty of confident critical exploration by candidates. Most centres are fully engaged with the specification for the coursework folder and its potential for encouraging candidates' best work. The challenges of this unit, where all four assessment objectives are assessed, continue to be met enthusiastically by the majority of candidates.

There are some centres – possibly new to the specification - where candidates have chosen tasks which did not allow them fully to access all the relevant assessment objectives. In the Explorative Study this was mainly because they had not taken enough account of the demands of Assessment Objective 3. In the Creative Critical Response it was 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 because there were not opportunities for the candidates to engage, critically, with the texts.

Although the vast majority of centres had put a great deal of 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 very clear; the assessment by other centres was 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 were clearly intended for the candidate, rather than a moderator.

Explorative Study

Favoured Shakespeare titles include *Hamlet* and *Othello* as well as *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Measure for Measure* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. For comparison many offer, *Dr Faustus*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The White Devil*, *Volpone*, *The Revengers' Tragedy* and *The Rover*. Among the interesting studies this year were some effective pairings of *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* on the subject of 'outsiders'. Very popular, too, are arguments about feminist readings of the women in some of these texts, favourites being Lady Macbeth, Ophelia, Gertrude, Emilia, Desdemona, Hero and Beatrice.

Whilst familiar texts continue to be popular for the Explorative Study, many centres successfully combine less familiar texts, ranging across the 1300 to 1800 period, such as *Everyman*, *The Revengers' Tragedy*, *The Changeling*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, and *The Country Wife*, with a variety of Shakespeare plays.

Assessment Objective 3 is the most heavily-weighted on the Explorative Study, but some centres have still not fully engaged with this. Although most candidates made links between texts central to their study, there were a number who dealt with texts almost entirely separately, with a lengthy section on one play followed by another (often 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. Task-setting continues to be central here and candidates need to be supported in developing strategies for linking texts.

More common was a tendency to ignore, or pay lip-service to, the second part of AO3, the 'informed by interpretations of other readers' part. Many candidates included lots of quotations from critics, but failed entirely to engage with these or to use them as the basis of further argument.

A significant number of candidates again in this series had failed to include a bibliography with their work. Perhaps not surprisingly, this tended to coincide with a lack of engagement with the views of other readers. Candidates must be encouraged to read around the central texts and to acknowledge clearly their sources.

Creative Critical Response

Many candidates continued to take full advantage of the opportunities afforded by the Creative Critical Response for them to be experimental in style and write in different formats. There were lots of lively and engaging pieces, often demonstrating very skilful manipulation of form and a confident critical approach. Topics ranged from a director's diary extract discussing a modern interpretation of *The Duchess of Malfi* to a letter to Coleridge responding to his damning criticism of *Measure for Measure*.

A few centres still don't set 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.

For the last two years we have been encouraging centres to avoid allowing candidates simply to write a straight 'review' of a play or film: this does not allow them to demonstrate the critical and contextual engagement that is required for AO4 on this piece. Some centres have failed to note that the requirements for AO4 on the CCR piece are different from those for AO4 on the Explorative Study. Centres are urged to think carefully about how they set tasks for this part of the unit.

Explorative Study

AO1

'Compare the significance of politics in *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.'

However it is debatable as to what motivates each spirit. Puck is under the command of Oberon willingly, in that he lies within the fairy hierarchy, but his ultimate aim in life seems to be to create pandemonium. Harold Brooks comments that, 'he relishes topsy-turvydom itself ('those things that do best please me befall preposterously').' So Brooks highlights Puck's love of anarchy. On the other hand, Ariel is far more straightforward; his more mature and constrained behaviour is down to his position as a slave to Prospero, indicating that his motivation is his ultimate liberation. In Ariel's initial dialogue with Prospero in Act I, he reminds him of 'what thou hast promised, Which is not yet performed me...my Liberty.' The fact that he stresses that it has not yet been granted demonstrates his anxiety to achieve his freedom. It transpires that Ariel had previously been under the command of the 'foul witch Sycorax' and imprisoned in a tree from which Prospero freed him in return for service and duty. At pains to remind Ariel of the torture from which he saved him, Prospero recalls, 'thy groans did make wolves howl and penetrate the Breasts of ever-angry bears,' the hyperbole suggesting that the torment had been so great that even fearsome wild animals had sympathised. So Ariel is locked into service to Prospero and therefore his motivation of freedom is expressed more openly and clearly to the audience...

Moderator's Comment:

This candidate clearly articulates the argument in the opening sentence of the paragraph ('*it is debatable*'). A sense of organisation and clarity of thought are evident ('*On the other hand*'). There is a confidence in tone and accuracy of expression. The terminology used is appropriate ('*motivation*'; '*initial dialogue*'; '*hyperbole*' etc) and points made are substantiated with pertinent examples from the text. This is a high band response on AO1.

Moderator's Tip:

Try early on in your essay to bring all the assessment objectives into play. For instance, this candidate makes early reference to effects of language in the play ('*the hyperbole suggesting that...*') - AO2. There is also a clear comparison being established between the two drama texts ('*On the other hand Ariel is much more straightforward...*') and the candidate uses a critical interpretation by another reader to develop his argument ('*...so Brooks*

highlights Puck's love of anarchy...') – A03. And this candidate goes on to explore the plays as texts of colonisation – A04.

A02

'Explore the ways in which masters and servants are presented in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*'

...Shakespeare's use of dialogue subtly and effectively demonstrates the power relations in the two plays. Right from the first scene of Act I of 'The Tempest' we see the importance of the master-servant distinction through the use of language. The characters are named in terms of their social status and hierarchical role and are called 'Boatswain', 'Master' and 'King'. The servant-master theme is highlighted from the start as the word 'master' is used several times and both Antonio and Alonso say, 'Where is thy master?' Similarly to modern day, in Elizabethan society speech was a clear indicator of social superiority. Formal and respectful language was to be used for those of a higher social status than oneself. Simple signs of respect are shown by the use of 'ye' and 'you'. 'Thee' and 'thou' were used when speaking to someone of lower social standing. For example Oberon addresses his servant Puck with, 'I pray thee give it to me.' Puck is respectful and says, 'Fear not my lord,' and calls himself, 'your servant.' In a conversation Oberon tells Puck, 'This is thy negligence. Still thou mistak'st, Or else committ'st thy knaveries wilfully,' and Puck replies, 'Did you not tell me I should know the man / By the Athenian garments he had on?' Similarly in 'The Tempest' Ariel shows respect for Prospero by calling him, 'master'. He is also frequently addressed by the title, 'Sir' and 'my noble master.' In these ways the master-servant themes and relationships are revealed through Shakespeare's use of language...

Moderator's Comment:

This is a very good example of detailed analysis of language and structure, showing excellent understanding of how writers manipulate these to make meaning. The candidate fully embeds comments about language and imagery into the main body of his argument. References to the text are entirely pertinent, but are brief enough to sustain the vigour of the argument.

AO3

'Using your wider reading, compare the presentation of evil in Shakespeare's *Othello* and Jonson's *Volpone*.'

*Shakespeare presents evil through one character, whereas Jonson seems more sceptical about the whole of Venetian society. His message about greed leading to nowhere is identified when evil characters face punishment, often ironically being stripped of their wealth. However, both *Othello* and *Volpone* include elements of the mediaeval morality plays which were becoming less popular at the time of writing, there being a movement from the Bible towards the theatre as a source of moral teaching. Leah Scragg (1) recognises this, but argues that Iago is too dense to represent a morality play devil: 'It would be overstating the position to assert categorically that Iago's characterisation is necessarily derived from a traditional stage presentation of the Devil.' Nevertheless it is clear that both Shakespeare and Jonson cleverly use the audience's knowledge of the morality plays so that they can allude to them in their presentation of evil...*

Moderator's Comment:

There is evidence of genuine engagement with both texts here. The candidate sustains a productive comparison between the texts, skilfully weaving the comparison into the general argument. Clearly, this candidate has fulfilled the high band requirement of AO3 (part one) and has fully 'explored connections and comparisons between texts'. The second part of AO3, that candidates should, for the highest band, 'analyse interpretations of texts by other readers in a critical and sustained argument' is also fulfilled, with the candidate using Scragg's argument to strengthen and develop his own views of the plays.

AO4

'Compare the ways in which, in *Othello* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, the Duchess and Ophelia are used by dramatists to explore the theme of corruption.'

In comparison, the source of corruption in 'The Duchess of Malfi' does not unravel itself through a contamination of the morally sound. Instead, it is made clear by Webster's juxtaposition of the depraved Aragonese brothers and the honourable Duchess. Just as Polonius and Laertes's perverted treatment of Ophelia is Shakespeare's microcosmic illustration of Denmark's (England's?) corrupt body politic, Ferdinand and the Cardinal's unnatural interrogation of the Duchess in Act I, scene I, indicates immediately the enormous oppressive power of both the State and Church throughout Europe. The brothers

vulgarly express the implicit sixteenth century misogynistic messages which represented women as evil whores or witches:

*'And women like that part which, like the
lamprey, / Hath ne'er a bone in't.'*

*The Cardinal's corrupt hypocrisy is also displayed in his
assertion that, 'The marriage night / Is the entrance into
some prison...'*

Moderator's Comment:

A high-quality response to this assessment objective. The key elements of the highest band on Assessment Objective 4 are 'detailed', 'perceptive' and 'insightful.' In this answer the candidate has made perceptive comments about the effects on the plays of a range of contextual factors: for example, society ('...Denmark's (England's?) corrupt body...'); gender issues ('...sixteenth century misogynistic messages...'); and has linked these points very successfully with the writer's craft ('...is made clear by Webster's juxtaposition...').

Moderator's Tip:

It is really important that you properly integrate knowledge of context into your argument and link any points made to the plays themselves. Candidates who produce lengthy, 'stand-alone' paragraphs giving a potted history of the playwright or extended descriptions of contemporary society will not only be wasting words but will usually fail to access the highest bands on AO4 which require you to 'demonstrate perceptive understanding' of, rather than simply describe, contextual factors.

Creative Critical Response

AO1

'Write a letter to *The Times* theatre critic in response to his review of the BBC's Shakespeare Re-told version of *Much Ado About Nothing*.'

*Dear Mr Gill,
In response to your review of the BBC adaptation of Much
Ado, I vehemently disagree with you on many points.
Firstly, Hero was not 'truly welcome' because
Shakespeare's intention was to satirise and criticise the
idea of courtship, and while he may not have been a
proto-feminist, he almost certainly wanted to highlight the
idealised extremes of 16th Century womanhood. The
BBC's Hero proved to have very flexible morality, thus
diminishing the power of Shakespeare's message because
a modern audience does not deem promiscuity as entirely
taboo. Therefore I didn't enjoy Piper's portrayal of her*

because without the 'Dian' extreme, I found there were no virtues for Claude actually to slander...

Moderator's Comment:

This review is written in an entirely convincing style. The candidate has skilfully used the features of a letter to a newspaper arts reviewer – for example, the direct conversational tone (*'I vehemently disagree with you...'*); urbane humour (*'he may not have been a proto-feminist...'*) – whilst demonstrating a clear awareness of audience throughout. Top band for AO1.

Moderator's Tip:

The task for the Creative Critical piece should be very clear in terms of the proposed form, purpose and audience. It means that the moderator is able to see how you have used register and style to suit your purpose. Also, don't forget that the task description is not included in the folder's word count – it can be as long as you wish and in some cases a bit of background information in the task can save you taking up space in your final piece. You might, for example, choose to write a transcript of a radio discussion: use the task description to explain who is speaking to whom and what about so that your coursework piece can be an extract of the discussion where you concentrate on critical interpretation of the work rather than on the background to the discussion.

AO4

'Write a letter in response to Elvis Mitchell's review of the film 'O''

*Dear Mr Mitchell,
In reply to your comments about the modern adaptation of Othello – 'O' – I tend to agree with you on all but a few areas. You claimed that this adaptation was 'artless' and 'utterly superfluous' which I think is too harsh because the adaptation creates an opportunity for a wider audience to engage with Shakespeare...
...However, this version does rob Othello of its former grandeur, replacing Shakespeare's linguistic genius and Iago's destruction power with, as you say, 'only Hugo's fixation on hawks' to connect him with the Machiavel. I agree it's a feeble substitution for the eloquent language of Iago's soliloquies. The modern audience sees only the psychotic and not the Devil...*

Moderator's Tip:

Note how the candidate has referred to the original play while commenting on the adaptation. This is important if you want to achieve a top band mark on AO4 where you need to show an awareness of different critical reception over time. It is not enough simply to discuss a film version or an up-dated production. Keep in mind the original literary text.

Grade Boundaries

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