

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2012

GCE English Literature (6ET04)
Literary Studies

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General Overview

'This has been another interesting year,' writes a moderator. She has seen, in her allocation, centres using no fewer than 246 different texts. This is what she says:

This has been a demanding task for any moderator, but it is a joy to see more and more centres giving their students a free rein in response to the spirit of this unit. It has been particularly pleasing to note that it is often the students who have had this freedom who have produced excellent work. There have been some truly investigative and original essays submitted. The range of texts has been amazing including 'The Bible' and 'The Communist Manifesto' with a wide range of the canon in between.

Clearly this moderator received work from centres where students had been allowed to choose texts for themselves. However, this is only one of several possible approaches; students are often taught one or two texts, leaving them scope for their own choices, or sometimes they are taught up to three. What is disappointing, however, is to see cases where all students have not only studied the same texts but written almost the same essay, with the same title, using the same background critical material and the same framework, which they have obviously been supplied with as a guide for 'how to write an English essay.'

Another moderator comments on this:

Sometimes where a centre's candidates had all studied the same texts, they all produced the same examples and extracts and repeated very similar information and ideas on them. In other centres, where again all used the same texts, each student took a personal and independent approach: selected their own examples, and included contextual or critical material that they had clearly absorbed and understood for themselves. It isn't necessary for candidates each to take a completely different set of texts in order to be independent or original in their approach/analysis. They simply need to think for themselves, and to have the thorough knowledge and understanding of the texts and contexts to be able to do so.

There are clearly teachers who really believe in coursework and the opportunities it offers. Without turning this report into a campaign for its continuation, one could just point out a few of its advantages.

In the submissions this summer the moderators have seen work that is truly original and creative. This is not to say that it is impossible to be original and creative in an exam – the best students always are. But coursework offers a unique opportunity for students to find out things for themselves. Even if they are not in the process of discovering new texts for themselves, they can do their research on the prescribed ones. It was very encouraging to see students who

had done this, and who also realise what an excellent preparation it was for further study in Higher Education.

There is another side though. Another moderator writes:

There are still some candidates who are submitting what is, in all honesty, a two text response with only a nod in the direction of critical material.

As mentioned in every previous report, there is no objection to students writing on only two literary texts with the third being criticism. The third text must, however, be properly involved in the answer. A frequently asked question is: are students expected to refer to critics if they have taken the three literary texts option? The point to bear in mind here is the requirement of AO3 – students need to show an awareness of other readers. If the third text is criticism then those other readers, the critic(s), need to be specifically referred to; otherwise the essay can refer to other readers less specifically through saying such things as 'it would be possible to interpret this as meaning...' or 'many feminist critics disagree with this point of view.' It is also fair to say that, to achieve the top band, one would expect students at A2 to have read criticism or reviews, however many texts they were writing about, in order to sharpen their own point of view. A level of maturity and sophistication is required at this level; very occasionally moderators find that able candidates are writing about texts that have not challenged them quite enough. A brilliant individual could of course produce work of postgraduate level on a nursery rhyme; the rest of us need something to get to grips with that is substantial enough and rewarding enough to write about in the kind of depth required to attract high marks. Choice of texts and choice of topic are, therefore, very important.

Moderators spend some time writing reports, which have often been quite detailed, to every centre and these can be found online. (The report has the code name 'E9'.) Some teachers have said that they have never seen a report and it may be that schools need to check with their examination officers as there is likely to be helpful advice contained in them, or indeed, words of praise. Here are four examples from this year's batch:

All candidates had worked with very different texts, ranging from 'The Bible' to Tom Petty songs! This resulted in most interesting studies, all showing genuine engagement and original thinking.

Comments on the candidates' work were helpfully detailed and the centre's assessments were accurate. Thank you.

The folders arrived on time and equipped with Bibliographies. The thorough marginal annotation and summative assessment of each candidate's performance in relation to the key AOs enabled the moderator to see exactly how marks had been awarded and to endorse the Centre's judgement in each case.

The moderator commends the Centre's practice of tailoring each question (on the two plays and critical reading) to suit each candidate's interest and it was pleasing to see each candidate across the ability range responding with evident enjoyment and intellectual engagement to both texts and task.

Overall a successful submission where candidates had been appropriately challenged and their work carefully assessed: thank you.

There were no word counts for the two Shorter Studies, which Edexcel stipulates should be in total between 2,500 and 3,000 words, and it was difficult to see what focus the candidate was addressing when each essay was simply entitled 'War Poets' and 'Romantic Poets'. Neither piece foregrounded the context in which the poets were writing or the reception of their work today so the mark for AO4 was necessarily limited.

The teacher had, however, annotated the work and made an assessment of both pieces at the end of the second essay but uncertainty over the value of the four AOs meant that the final mark was inaccurate and the moderator was obliged to recommend an adjustment.

Examiner's comment:

These reports reflect the variety of texts and task set by centres and the thoroughness with which teachers have assessed the work. Evaluative references to the assessment objectives (not just copying verbatim from the criteria in the syllabus) are particularly helpful.

Examiner's tip:

Uncertainty over the AOs and what they mean is the biggest pitfall, as the last example shows. The assessment objectives are evenly weighted in this unit so teachers and students need to set about a task that will enable good marks to be reached in each of the areas – scrutiny of language, comparison of texts, awareness of other readers and context.

Overlap between set books and texts chosen for coursework

This is repeated from previous reports and there are a few points to bear in mind here:

- Students are allowed to write about texts that appear on the set book lists for other units, *provided that they have not written on them in exams or are not intending to do so in the future.*
- Students are not allowed to write about texts for unit 4 'that have previously been assessed in any other unit' (page 35 of the specification) which of course would include the AS coursework unit as well as Unit 1.
- Students and their teachers should ensure they keep to the 'three texts per unit' rule as prescribed by the regulator as a minimum requirement for study when A level syllabuses were prepared for first examinations in 2009. If a centre decides to carry the theme of, say, War, across from Unit 3, this rule would be infringed if the same text(s) were to be used twice.

Performance by Assessment Objectives

All examples of good practice here are taken from the 1206 summer submissions.

AO1 *Articulate creative, informed and relevant responses to literary texts, using appropriate terminology and concepts, and coherent, accurate written expression.*

Here is the opening of a student's creative piece. The candidate here has chosen the 'creative option' – in this case, writing a short piece in the style of Angela Carter before going on to write an evaluative essay, using her own writing as a springboard for exploring *The Bloody Chamber* alongside Keats' 'Isabella', Hans Christian Anderson's *The Little Mermaid* and a range of critical material.

Aura lay in the sand at the bottom of the shell garden, impatient. Sullen tangerine fish meandered about her. She looked out across the azure landscape and thought of her sisters, all of whom had reached the ripe age of fifteen; their tails had turned scarlet and they had left their father's castle. It was a matter of hours until her fate would be the same. She looked down at her pearly tail and sighed, wishing her youth away. Soon enough, the clock struck. Suddenly, her once-ivory tail was stained vermilion.

"My child, you have finally been tainted with femininity. Your time has come." Pontus, God of the Seas, kissed his daughter on the forehead, and Aura swam to the surface, craving her kismet.

The blazing sun that caressed Aura's unmarked skin was suddenly eclipsed by a great ship passing by. Staring down at Aura was Prince Tityos, an infamous warrior

known by all both above and below the surface. Aura gasped. What big eyes he had!

Readers may be pleased to know that later in this candidate's story, Aura murders Prince Tityos. The evaluative essay comments:

By murdering Tityos, Aura asserts her authority in an act of defiance that represents a rebellion against the patriarchal structure that has forced her to occupy a role of subservience. 'I have my voice, Tityos, and it will be the last one you shall hear.'

It is clear that this candidate has indeed found her own voice. The witty way in which she parodies both the fairytale formulas and Carter's own eroticism in her own writing, and then uses this to put forward a well reasoned argument, are very good examples of what is meant by AO1. This assessment objective is not just a question of writing accurate English. It is about finding a voice and using it to put forward a robust and relevant argument.

Word Limits

This is repeated from previous reports. A candidate who has failed to comply with the 3,000 word limit will not have shaped and organised material in a way which another candidate, mindful of this requirement, will have done; the latter could possibly be rewarded under Assessment Objective AO1 for 'fluent, cohesive and controlled writing' whereas the former is unlikely to reach this top band requirement. Please remember that assessors should stop reading once the 3,000 word limit has been reached.

AO2 *Demonstrate detailed critical understanding in analysing the ways in which structure, form and language shape meanings in literary texts.*

This is a question of looking at what a writer does, rather than what characters do, in their texts.

Looking at the same candidate as for AO1, here is what she writes in a concluding paragraph about her own work:

In writing 'The Mermaid's Marriage' [the title of her own creative piece] I have attempted to not only adopt Carter's feminist thematic approach, but also her linguistic style of rich description, allusion, short sentences and emphatic single-word paragraphs to reiterate ideas and slow the narrative pace. Whilst I have subverted many fairytale conventions, I have, like Carter, ensured that I maintained the use of magic realism to express the ideas within my story, such as the 'curse of submission' and transformation into an 'air spirit'. 'The Mermaid's Marriage' stands as an attempt to reconstruct Anderson's original patriarchal tale into a short story of a young

woman and her struggle for freedom in a world dominated by men.

Examiner's comment

The candidate here is able to step aside from her own piece of creative writing and comment on what she was trying to do. She is aware of some of the authorial techniques such as short sentences and emphatic single word paragraphs. It is clear from this that this particular candidate is aware of how writers go about the business of structuring their work.

Examiner's tip

Don't just spot features (alliteration, sibilance, etc.) Try to think about what the writer (whether it's yourself or William Shakespeare) is aiming to achieve by using these techniques.

AO3 and AO4

There are three requirements here. For AO3 students need to do two things: *explore connections and comparisons between different literary texts* and ensure their explorations are *informed by interpretations of other readers*. For AO4 they need to *demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received*.

These areas often overlap. Very often awareness of different contexts enables students to make worthwhile comparisons and contrasts between their texts, or to show how different readers, at different times, may well have had different interpretations.

It is also important to establish what is meant by context. Context is not simply setting. The example below explores *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys and *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. (The candidate has not used any of these texts previously in the AS exam, although two of them are set texts). Simply acknowledging that *Jane Eyre* is a Victorian novel, or that the heroine's schooldays reflect the misery of the Victorian classroom, or that her morals are "Victorian" does not address the 'significance and influence of the context' in which the novel is 'written and received'.

Here is the beginning of an essay to which the centre gave full marks for AO3 and AO4. The title was 'An exploration of the means by which Charlotte Bronte, Jean Rhys and Joseph Conrad present their protagonists in their struggle to overcome oppression in their novels.' It is a good example of the difference between 'setting' and the fuller sense of 'context'. It also illustrates how contextual knowledge is used not just for its own sake but linked to a literary consideration of the texts.

In the novels 'Jane Eyre', 'Wide Sargasso Sea' and 'Heart of Darkness' the protagonists are presented in their struggle to overcome oppression through use of setting and characterisation. The internal conflict between the

protagonists' sense of self and the expectations of society affect the individual to such a degree that they descend into a state of delirium. However, each novel represents different reactions to oppression, perhaps mirroring the social climate they were written in. In 'Jane Eyre' and 'Heart of Darkness' the protagonists are shown to regain a sense of identity, thus extracting themselves from the dangers of colonial oppression. This is in contrast to 'Wide Sargasso Sea', as Antoinette struggles with her sense of self as a result of her cultural background. As a member of an ex-slave owning Creole family her place in society is presented as ambiguous. The common thread in these novels is that each protagonist's sense of identity is jeopardised by love, making them vulnerable in their struggle to overcome oppression.

Rhys, Bronte and Conrad use setting to illuminate the protagonists in their struggle against oppression. The thematic concern of social injustice is explored by each author. In her novel 'Wide Sargasso Sea', Jean Rhys draws a correlation between Jamaica and a lost paradise. Like Eden, Jamaica is a place of natural beauty, corrupted by man:

'Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible – the tree of life grew there. But it had grown wild. The paths were overgrown and a smell of dead flowers mixed with that fresh living smell.'

The emphatic position of 'But' explores the idea that the lush exoticism of Jamaica has become too sensuous, making exploitation inevitable. The decadent society created by European colonizers, coupled with the 1883 Emancipation Act, robbed Jamaica of reliable authority. Antoinette is a direct product of this social milieu, as she is unable to assert her independence from the forces of oppression:

"Justice," she said. "I've heard that word. It's a cold word. I tried it out," she said, still speaking in a low voice. "I wrote it down. I wrote it down several times and always it looked like a damn cold lie to me. There is no justice."

Rhys highlights the hypocrisy of English colonialism. In theory it meant to establish a socio-political infrastructure abroad, but in reality it resulted in the collapse of cultural identity and autonomy. Rhys' critique of English colonialism is evident in her narrative technique, as despite the fact that she gives Rochester a narrative voice, she writes from a distinctly Caribbean perspective.

The author's use of language is significant at this point; the simplistic, almost childlike narration contrasts with the adult thematic concern of being powerless to the forces of social injustice: 'I've heard that word. It's a cold word.'

Examiner's comment:

This opening reads really well and fluently. The student obviously knows a good deal about colonialism, but this knowledge does not swamp other (and in the case of an English Literature essay) more important things – scrutiny of the text itself.

Examiner's tip:

Choosing texts which themselves present links or contrasts with regard to context gives you plenty to write about. In this way you can link context (AO4) and comparison points (AO3), one point leading fluently on to the next.

Further on in the same essay the candidate writes this:

The writers suggest that a lack of love in childhood is more likely to cause acceptance of oppression. In Jane Eyre, the protagonist grows up in her aunt's house-hold as an outsider:

'She lay reclined on the sofa by the fireside, and with her darlings about her looked perfectly happy. Me she had dispensed from joining the group.'

The syntax of this sentence presents Jane as being shackled to a life of dependency. As an orphan, she is dependent on the Reeds, reducing her position to 'less than a servant'. Bronte makes the reader aware of her 'physical inferiority' to her cousins through narrative technique; however one could argue that this attitude extends into her psychological mentality. As a child, Jane assumes that her cousins' claims of superiority are true, something that is not broken until Rochester is crippled and Jane is his equal. Being continuously terrorised by her cousin John, the 'slave-driver', has made her 'habitually obedient.' Ironically, it is after Jane asserts her autonomy that she is taken to the Red Room. Through the use of setting, it is evident that this is the place where she first experiences physical exile and imprisonment. This room has strong psychological effects on Jane, as she recalls her time there when she feels confined and humiliated. This is evident the night Rochester suggests she becomes his mistress.

In 'Wide Sargasso Sea', this sense of isolation is developed, as it is Antoinette's upbringing which exacerbates her 'inherited' condition....

Examiner's Comment:

There is evidence here that an interesting comparison is going to be made between the texts. There is also an interpretation that is tentatively put forward. The essay reads 'however one could argue...' and a psychological connection is made between Jane's early experience in the Red Room and what happens to her in later life.

Examiner's Tip:

Sustaining comparisons and being aware of other interpretations is what AO3 is all about. Here the writer uses the phrase 'however one could argue'. No specific critic is mentioned – that doesn't matter. It is the openness to interpretation that counts. Feel free to explore ideas, just as this candidate does in linking the heroine's early experience of being confined, literally, in the Red Room in her aunt's house to being trapped in her adult relationships in later life.

Choices of topics and texts

Some very interesting combinations of texts have appeared this summer. Here are a few of them with abbreviated versions of the assignments set:

- *Medea, The White Devil, The Cask of Amontillado* – the morality of taking revenge in particular contexts.
- *A Streetcar Named Desire, The Reluctant Fundamentalist, Neighbour Rosicky*, - alienation and immigrant protagonists.
- Any three from: *The Handmaid's Tale, Brave New World, Utopia, Woman on the Edge of Time, Herland* – dystopian fiction: role of women.
- Any three from *Enduring Love, Hamlet, The Yellow Wallpaper, The Bell Jar* - mental illness in response to pressures of social / cultural context.
- *Heart of Darkness, Things Fall Apart* "Africa is not a continent but a cause manipulated by writers to their own ends". What is your response to this statement in the light of reading writers' portrayals of Africa?"
- Any three from: *Rape of the Lock, A Modest Proposal, Animal Farm, Nineteen Eighty-Four, Brave New World, The Time Machine* – social satire across several centuries
- *Dr Faustus, Paradise Lost, A Clockwork Orange* - the presentation of the anti-hero over time
- *The Picture of Dorian Gray, The Great Gatsby, The Waste Land* - shared disillusionment with contemporary society.

- *The Bell Jar*, *One Flew Over* and BBC documentary, *The Trap*, on the work of R D Laing - Society and mental illness.

Examiner's Comment:

These are all combinations that have worked well, many of them being sufficiently rich in potential that, even when students have studied books from the same bank of texts, tasks have been created which are sufficiently different from one another to allow for independence and research.

Examiner's Tip:

Read the texts you have chosen once. Then think up a couple of possible essay titles, or ask for suggestions. Read the books again, this time making notes and see which assignment is likely to work best.

Conclusion

Here are some key reminders for students and their teachers:

- Please send the work on time – January 10th and June 15th are the dates by which it should have reached the moderator (and not just be put in the post).
- There is no need to send the work to be signed for unless it is the centre's policy to do this (although a certificate of posting will of course need to be kept). Centres which are late sending work sometimes do this but it only delays collection from the post office if the moderator is not at home.
- A cumulative word count is needed at the foot of each page.
- A Bibliography is needed.
- It is a great help for everyone if pages are numbered.
- A treasury tag is the most helpful way of putting sheets together.
- Please make sure candidates use nothing smaller than 11 or 12 point in their word processing.
- Evaluative comments from the centre enable the moderator to see why the mark has been given and, hopefully, be able to agree with it.
- Just writing 'AO2' in the margin every time a student uses a quotation is not helpful.
- It is good to see that centres, when appropriate, have standardised internally and to see the comments of different teachers – even when they disagree and marks have been adjusted. When Moderator's adjustments are needed, we try to preserve the centre's rank order if possible in order that the marks

returned to the centre actually make sense to them on results day – where there is inconsistency in the marking, however, this becomes impossible.

- Please ensure that you get to see the E9 (Report to Centre). There have been some very full and helpful reports submitted by moderators. They are available online, but some schools have said they needed to remind their exams office in order to get to see them.
- Appropriate task setting is of major importance. If a centre has any doubts about a particular topic or text, or wants confirmation, the Ask the Expert service is a very useful resource.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>