

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2013

GCE English Literature (6ET04/01)
Reflections in Literary Studies

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General Overview

Most centres are fully engaged with the specification for the coursework folder and its potential for encouraging students' best work. Some of the comments from moderators to centres might show something of the range of centres, the choice of texts and approaches, and the common points that the moderating team is making:

"Candidates had clearly relished preparing their A2 coursework with the focus on Gothic literature and the moderator was impressed to see the range of well-focused titles which had challenged candidates to engage purposefully with their texts. The question on the presentation of women in Gothic literature which invited a candidate to consider a Coleridge quotation ('shameless harlotry' or 'trembling innocence') in relation to the chosen texts worked particularly well."

"Although all candidates offered the same texts, they had clearly been encouraged to read and research critical opinion independently and an interesting range of topics had been negotiated with the candidates, enabling them to engage personally with their texts. The moderator was particularly impressed by an unusual Darwinist approach to how language and structure had been adopted by Williams and Dorfman to delineate character in 'Streetcar' and 'Death and the Maiden'."

"It was interesting to see how different candidates had used different texts to explore the broad theme of mental instability. There were some excellent links. At first sight, the tasks set seemed possibly to lead the students into writing about characters as real people – 'How far do circumstances and relationships ... contribute to characters' mental instabilities?' - but it was clear from reading the responses that this was not a problem as the essays were very good at exploring writers' techniques and candidates had clearly been shown how to address the Assessment Objectives vigorously."

"These candidates studied a wide range of texts under the broad theme of the importance of place and setting. 'A Streetcar Named Desire' worked well alongside Pinter's 'The Homecoming' and Shaw's 'Pygmalion'; the collection of Stan Barstow's short stories 'The Likes of Us' was used effectively alongside 'kitchen sink' drama, with a real awareness of genre."

"It was noted that all your students wrote on the same texts and used the same essay title. Furthermore they had clearly been shown 'how to write a good Unit 4 essay' with the result that all folders read very similarly, almost paragraph by paragraph. One or two students might have benefitted from the reassurance of this approach, though it is not really in the spirit of coursework which offers an opportunity for individual research and investigation beyond anything exams in themselves can provide, but for most the approach has not helped them score in the higher bands of the assessment criteria, where originality is significant."

Moderator's Comment:

Moderators look at work from so many different centres all working under different conditions and looking often at very different texts.

Moderator's Tip (for teachers):

Ensure you read the E9 report to your centre. In just a few cases the reports for several consecutive years point out the same things which have gone unheeded, almost as if the teachers have not actually seen the report. The report is available on Edexcel Online from Results Day.

Overlap between set books and texts chosen for coursework

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.

An important note about plagiarism and near-plagiarism

Plagiarism is relatively easy to detect and there is a clear (legal) process that takes place on the rare occasions it happens. Moderators, like most teachers, have particularly sensitive antennae when it comes to reading something that has a certain feel to it – sometimes it is not in the style of the rest of an essay, or it is something one has read before, and systems like Google or Turnitin can confirm suspicions. There can be a grey area however, and students should be warned about this. Essays are sometimes found which contain passages that, while not lifted wholesale from an internet source or a student guide, have been very slightly modified; the result is a paragraph that the student cannot really claim as his or her own because neither the ideas nor the expression have been properly digested and reworked. Nothing of course is ever entirely original: the student who claims that Stella, not Blanche, is the real tragic figure in *Streetcar* is not the first person to have thought of this but, in a way that every teacher of English will understand, it is possible for the idea to come out of the essay with a freshness and originality of its own.

Moderator's Comment:

You will nearly always enrich your answer by finding out what other people have said about the books you are writing about. The internet is a good starting point for this, as are "real books" in a library.

Moderator's Tip:

Remember that teachers and moderators are on the lookout for originality. You might also consider the assessment objective AO3, which looks for your own response to different points of view. Instead of just quoting something you have read, offer an opinion on it.

Performance by Assessment Objectives

All examples of good practice here, with one exception, are taken from this summer's submissions, 2013.

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

This is the opening of an essay on "How writers present obsession with purity as a destructive force within "A Streetcar Named Desire", "The World's Wife" and "Oranges are not the only fruit."

Purity is a social and religious construct which has been used for decades as a method of controlling female sexuality, forcing heterosexuality and an obsession with virginity onto women from a young age. De Beauvoir states "The young girl is dedicated to 'purity' and 'innocence' just when she is discovering ... the mysterious stirrings of life and sex she is supposed to be white as snow." This highlights exactly how society's forcing of outdated and sexist ideals of purity suppresses female sexuality and is therefore damaging. In "A Streetcar Named Desire", "The World' Wife" and "Oranges are not the Only Fruit" women are expected to be pure and virginal in a way that is not expected of men, leading to exploitative gender roles. Although in many ways women of the 21st century are liberated in ways that Blanche in "Streetcar", Jeanette in "Oranges" or the classic mythological characters within "The World's Wife" are not, the rise of fashions such as American "purity balls" which create what Oppenheimer calls "an industry of purity" and the resurgence of religious fundamentalism across the world indicate that purity is still a fixation for many sectors of society.

Moderator's Comment:

This student has found, or been given, an excellent title that leads to a truly investigative approach. The opening paragraph exploits it well, finding good contextual points and linking texts that one would not normally think of as being considered together.

Moderator's Tip:

Get yourself a good, investigative title and start your essay by showing you mean business – focus on the terms of your title and, if appropriate, introduce all your texts in the opening paragraph to demonstrate how you are going to develop links between them.

A note for teachers and assessors about word length:

A student who has failed to comply with the 3,000 word limit will not have shaped and organised material in a way which another student, 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 an extract from an essay which considers the way that Myfanwy Piper, in her libretto for Britten's opera "The Turn of the Screw" has reduced Henry James' original novella to a fraction of its original length; the title is "Less is sometimes more: to what extent have shortened versions of texts retained, or even increased, the power of the originals?".

Myfanwy Piper's libretto gives Quint words that Henry James does not, In the novella everything is seen through the eyes of the governess, whereas Britten's opera actually presents the ghosts of Quint and Miss Jessel before our eyes. Quint says (or sings) to Miles
"I am the hidden life that stirs
When the candle is out;
Upstairs and down, the footsteps barely heard.
The unknown gesture, and the soft, persistent word,
The long sighing flight of the night-winged bird."

It is difficult to know what Henry James might have made of this because the central issue of the novella is: are the ghosts real, or just a concoction of the governess' brain? The libretto however establishes what the novella implies – there was a secret liaison between Miles and Quint. Even in the opera its exact nature is unspecified. We know it happens "when the candle is out" and there follow a series of rhymes- heard, bird, word, each one reinforcing the other – the "footsteps" are barely heard (something secretive, perhaps illicit, is happening) the "word" is both soft and persistent suggesting seduction, but the bird seems to be the owl, sighing, and there are connotations of death and a spirit beyond the grave. Miles is being seduced into another world, beyond the reach of the governess. The scene in the opera ends with Miles telling the governess "You see, I am bad, I am bad, aren't I?" Then he kisses her. In the novella Miles also kisses the governess and refers to himself as being "bad". However, Henry James records the governess' thoughts on the incident as this is a first person narrative:
" I shall never forget the sweetness and gaiety in which he brought out the word "When I'm bad I am bad" and how, on top of it, he bent forward and kissed me."

Moderator's Comment:

Close scrutiny of individual words is coupled here with an awareness of what the writer is doing, and the genre in which the student is writing.

Moderator's Tip:

Keep quotations short, but have quite a lot to say about them if possible.

AO3 and AO4

There are three requirements here. For AO3 essays 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*.

This is an extract from an essay which looks at the ways in which Tennessee Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire", Pinter's "The Homecoming" and Osborne's "Look Back in Anger" disturb their audiences.

Not only is the use of exaggeration, nonsensical statements and contradiction designed to reflect the flaws of the middle classes, but, on a deeper level, "you can't move for them" [the previous paragraph has been discussing Jimmy's reference to Helena's middle class background] suggests Jimmy's confinement to his working class position. Thus Osborne cleverly uses crude language and satire to make society aware of its ills, a technique which undoubtedly would have disturbed a 1950s audience.

In "A Streetcar Named Desire", on the other hand, it is the content of Williams' language which disturbs. Early reviews seemed to focus on the sexual aspect of the plot – Trewin dismissed the play as "a squalid anecdote of a nymphomaniac's decay in a New Orleans slum". Williams deals with subject matters not previously encountered on stage; as well as alcoholism, homosexuality and rape, he controversially presents a woman driven by desire. Blanche describes herself as being taken "where I'm ashamed to be" by "Desire!...that rattle-trap streetcar that bangs through the Quarter". Although this is deeply shocking it could diminish the emotional impact of the play for some. Whereas a 1950s audience may blame Blanche for her misfortune and even see her as a type of villain, a modern audience may more easily accept her as a tragic figure and may thus be more shaken by the play's emotionally charged conclusion.

Moderator's Comment:

This essay has a very confident feel to it – the writer has obviously researched critical opinion and linked it to contexts both contemporary and modern.

Moderator's Tip:

Do your research. That early review of "Streetcar" which called it a "squalid anecdote" is delightful and captures perfectly the idea of how opinions and reactions to texts can change over time.

Choices of topics and texts

"Madness was a popular theme this summer" reports one moderator, "along with dystopias, colonialism and patriarchy." She adds the comments below:

"For madness, the most common texts were *Hamlet*, *The Yellow Wallpaper*; for Dystopias, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *1984*, *Brave New World* and *The Hunger Games* (unfortunately often the film rather than the book, and leading to many paragraphs of plot and description of the Games); for colonialism *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*, often using Achebe's essay on Conrad; for patriarchy, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Yellow Wallpaper*. Film was sometimes used well: I saw some good work on *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* as a comparison to *Dancing at Lughnasa* and *Translations*, but some choices of film did not encourage an analytical approach, or were not treated analytically. There were some interesting combinations: Tim Butcher's *Blood River*, and a book of short stories, *An Elegy for Easterly* (Petina Gappah): both made interesting third texts to compare with *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*."

Conclusion

It has been particularly encouraging this year to see many centres having increased confidence in their approach to this unit by setting a variety of tasks and often allowing students to find texts for themselves (or often a compromise: the centre teaches one or two texts and allows a third independent choice). Guidance from the teachers remains essential however, but giving independence to the students is very much in the spirit of this unit and enables us to assess skills that cannot be tested by examinations alone.

A few practical points commonly arising on reports to centres:

- Do make sure that the moderator receives work by the published date (May 15th). This is the actual deadline – receiving it early is always appreciated.
- Unless it is your centre's policy, there is no need for the parcel to be sent "signed for" (although it is important to obtain a certificate of posting for your own records).
- Remember to include the folders with the highest and lowest marks, even if they are not asterisked. (A tip: a sudden really good piece of work in a more modest collection, or one that is markedly below the standard of the rest is not necessarily worth full marks just because it is the best one in the pack, nor is the weakest candidate necessarily worthy of a mark down in the teens and twenties. Getting these, and the rank order right, help to present a stable collection of marks that will make sense to the moderator).
- Be as helpful as possible to the moderator by commenting evaluatively on the students' work. It is quite tempting only to pick up on the positives in a response, but an acknowledgment of weakness also helps the moderator to confirm the centre's judgement.

- OPTEMS: the centre should keep the green one. Enclose the yellow one with the work that goes to the moderator. The top copy goes to Hellaby, Rotherham. It is important to retain the green one at the centre in case anything is lost in the post, and sending the top copy to the moderator delays the process of inputting marks into the database.

Grade Boundaries

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

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

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