

Examiners' Report

Summer 2016

Pearson Edexcel GCE in English
Literature (6ET02)

Paper 2 Explorations in Drama

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Candidate Performance

Once again there was evidence – across the ability range - of much productive engagement with texts and tasks; however, this final year of AS English Literature coursework from the 2008 specification was characterised by much smaller entries from most centres where the candidates had resubmitted one or both pieces of AS coursework. Out of the 177 centres moderated, the majority had entered only one or two evidently 'resit' candidates.

Moderators made the following comments on their centres' submissions:

- One centre sent in last year's AS coursework alongside this summer's submission and it was interesting to see the improved performance of the candidate, especially in the Explorative Study, where a much more focused question had been devised to enable a more cogently argued response (and higher marks for AOs 1 and 3 in particular).
- There was a centre where it appeared that the whole Year 11 cohort had been entered for AS specification. It was clear that these candidates, although very able and well-read, were noticeably less mature in their structuring and self-expression and although many had been awarded full marks by their teachers, it was felt that AO1 on both the Explorative Study and Creative Critical Response (where candidates had been routinely awarded 12) had been generally over-valued.
- It was pleasing to see a number of candidates who may not have performed so well last year tackling both their Explorative Studies and Creative Critical Responses with greater confidence this time round, as Year 13 students, taking care to ensure that they addressed all the key AOs emphatically in order to justify marks in the top bands.
- Several centres had clearly made an effort to devise a greater range of imaginative responses to the Creative Critical Response: notable examples included one candidate who produced a well-researched, effectively slanted review of *Twelfth Night* at the Globe for the Rotten Tomatoes website and a whole centre where each candidate prefaced their Creative Critical Response with an analysis of the idiolect of the critic whose style they were adopting – Roger Ebert of *Chicago Sun-Times* being a case in point.
- Particularly impressive was a candidate's convincingly argued riposte to Yasmin Alibhai-Brown's assessment (in her very recent Radio 4 "Love Across the Racial Divide" series of programmes) of Shakespeare's portrayal of Desdemona, which demonstrated very clear awareness of how *Othello* is **now** received and perceived, over 500 years after its first performance.
- Some of the same trends as have been noted in past Principal Moderator's Reports were again in evidence this time round where candidates tended to overlook the demands of AO4 (on both the Explorative Study and Creative Critical Response), even though this represents over a quarter of the marks out of 80 when both assignments are taken into account, or had been rewarded with inflated marks for AO2 where they had merely quoted the text rather than engaged closely with structure, form and language.
- Candidates invariably scored more highly on AO4 when their Explorative Study questions drew attention in the title to "how audiences over time

have responded to texts" and their Creative Critical Response tasks (with a specific publication/broadcast context) reminded candidates to look at how texts have been received in different contexts. A question on how contemporary and modern audiences might respond rather differently to the presentation of kings as leaders in Shakespeare's *Henry V* and Marlowe's *Edward II* worked well in enabling candidates to demonstrate clear contextual awareness (of both then and now) for AO4.

- Those candidates who made reference to different productions of their texts (in the theatre or on film) scored well for the second strand of AO3 as well as for AO4 in the Explorative Study.
- Explorative Study tasks which offered a critic's assertion (such as the claim that Shakespeare presents Othello and Caliban as "the Exotic Other" for an early-17th-century audience) followed by "To what extent do you agree....?" generally encouraged candidates to establish and develop more robust arguments for AO1 than such generalised titles as "How are love and relationships tackled in *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*?" or "Compare Othello and Hamlet as tragic figures in Shakespeare's tragedies".
- Inevitably, with a smaller entry from most centres, many candidates had responded to the same question (often one which foregrounded the role of female characters in two plays), which often resulted in some duplication of material (including virtually identical opening paragraphs). There were however several centres where greater variety of response was achieved, even though everyone tackled the same task, through the range of background reading undertaken by candidates including such texts as Machiavelli's *The Prince* (which reinforced candidates' understanding of the 16th century context) and Frank Kermode's *Shakespeare's Language* (which encouraged candidates to look more closely at all aspects of the writer's craft).
- A further 'economy' noted in this series was candidates in several centres making use of the same material (especially textual references and examples) in their Explorative Study and Creative Critical Response e.g. focusing on the presentation of women in *Othello* and *The Duchess of Malfi* in their essay and then interviewing the actress playing Desdemona for the Creative Critical Response.
- Conversely, in a couple of centres, candidates had introduced a third play for the Creative Critical Response where candidates would probably have been more successful had they focused in the Explorative Study and Creative Critical Response on two clearly differentiated 'angles' on their two set plays.
- Whilst some candidates had produced commendably long lists of secondary reading for their Bibliographies (whole texts rather than websites), others cited just their studied texts (usually without publication details) and a few omitted to include a Bibliography, a specification requirement, at all, although critical material (if referenced) was usually cited in foot-notes.
- Relatively few candidates had offered cumulative word counts and in quite a few cases there was felt to be greater fluctuation in word-length this time with some very short and very long folders. Explorative Studies in particular varied from under 1,200 to almost 3,000 words (plus foot-notes!).

- *Othello* featured most frequently, in combination with *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, while *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* continued to prove a popular and productive combination, not least for candidates interested in looking at Shakespeare's use of asides and soliloquies which involved engagement with structure and form as well as language for AO2.
- In terms of presentation, candidates were still reluctant to indicate with a / where line-endings occur when quoting verse, suggesting they were unaware of the difference between blank verse and prose, and there was again a tendency towards undifferentiated paragraphing which has such a negative impact on essay-structure.

As always, the most successful Centres were those which offered candidates a choice of carefully-phrased tasks, encouraged them to read widely in order to develop their own interpretations of texts, guided them through the drafting process, reminding them of the key AOs and engaged as comprehensively and consistently with the candidates' work (when annotating it and judging its quality) as the candidates had done with the texts themselves.

Assessment Issues

There were some cases where centre moderators had not applied the Assessment Criteria with their usual consistency and scrupulous care. Moderators felt that this may be because of smaller numbers being submitted and the demands on teachers to become acquainted with new specifications this year. This lack of precision was particularly problematic when candidates were often quite 'bunched' and there was a tendency for blanket over-rewarding of candidates' work across the Assessment Objectives on the Explorative Studies, although equally there were cases where candidates' performance on both Explorative Study and Creative Critical Response had been under-valued.

Another factor, which contributed to this imprecision of assessment, was for candidates' work to be only lightly annotated, often with little explanation of how marks had been awarded for each Assessment Objective. Such lack of close engagement with the fabric of candidates' responses usually resulted in an over-valuing of performance but there were several occasions where whole pages had no ticks or teacher comment of any kind and candidates' achievement had therefore not been adequately recognised in the marks awarded.

Where comments **had** been appended, there was sometimes a disparity between teacher remarks and marks awarded e.g. "narrative connections" and "limited use of conditions" in the over-view of performance yet marks were awarded in the top bands for AOs 3 and 4 on the Explorative Study. Again, some inflated marks for AO3 were awarded where candidates had offered an unbalanced argument and made little attempt to incorporate meaningfully their critical reading into a coherent assessment of how different readers interpret texts. By contrast, some candidates who had produced a workmanlike, generally coherent comparative argument with appropriate acknowledgement of other readers' interpretations of their texts were significantly undervalued for this most heavily-weighted AO,

suggesting that some markers had got out of the habit of applying accurately the 7-band AO3 mark-scheme.

Nevertheless there were a good few well-judged and truly excellent essays where candidates had offered a thoroughly convincing and effectively synthesised response to their Explorative Study task and fully deserved top band marks.

Most centres had undertaken some form of internal standardisation of the marks awarded when more than one teacher has been involved with assessing the coursework, with the front cover Centre-Assessor box used to document the outcome. Moderators commended in the E9 reports those centres where teachers had not stinted in their careful assessment of candidates' achievement and had clearly sought to ensure that those students who had sought to improve on last year's performance in this unit had been appropriately supported and their achievement meticulously judged.

Administration Issues

There were some instances where teachers had incorrectly totalled marks for the AOs on the front-cover or there was a discrepancy between folder totals and marks on the OPTEMS, which necessitated phone-calls to the centres concerned to ascertain the correct mark.

There were several cases where candidates had not supplied their candidate numbers or overall word-counts on the front cover. The absence of cumulative word counts was particularly inconvenient when candidates' work had been incorrectly stapled together.

Overall, however, the majority of centres are to be commended where teachers throughout the life of this specification have worked hard to raise their candidates' performance in meeting the demands of this challenging AS unit and have sought to apply a complex mark scheme with precision and sensitivity to the assessment of a range of high-order skills in their students' AS English Literature coursework.

Examples of candidates' work

Explorative Study

Key characteristics of top band performance

AO1

- wide knowledge and understanding, using appropriate terminology and accurate, well-structured writing (**'However, even within the institution of marriage, Shakespeare and Webster show how the expression of female desire is feared. It is perceived as being unmeasured and uncontrolled, or as Valerie Traub puts it, as "frightening and dangerous"...'**)

AO2

- explores writer's use of structure, form and language to shape meaning (**'Bosola compares Ferdinand to a plum tree that grows" crooked over standing pools". This image simultaneously depicts the rotting contemporary social order and the inequalities in a patriarchal society...'**)

A03

- **explores** connections and comparisons between texts and shows **clear understanding** of different views ('**Like Mrs Malaprop, whose misjudged verbosity...renders her a ridiculous character throughout 'The Rivals', it is Malvolio's misjudged self-importance which makes him comical**' / '**To further explore the weakness of pride, G.R Elliot has described this as "the essence of all spiritual evil", (1953) and some say that Othello's pride is indeed, the cause of his tragic downfall. We are told by Iago at the beginning, that Othello's pride almost governs his actions and even, speech (I. i)...'**)

A04

- **shows understanding** of contextual issues around texts by commenting appropriately ('**Pinciss's argument that Overdo represents the Church of England...is perhaps too specific and unhelpful in examining Jonson's broader criticism of naïve and pompous governing figures in London at the time. Within a burgeoning mercantile city, self-service seems to be the defining characteristic of a class...in the face of heightened criminal activity and materialism.'**)

Creative Critical Response

Key characteristics of top band performance

A01

- demonstrates **clear awareness** of register and audience and writes **persuasively** in the chosen critical form ('**..A consistent problem throughout the production was the hollow chemistry between Isabella and Angelo. Liam Brennan's lacklustre Anglo failed to convince us that he was a controlling leader or a menacing villain...'**)

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