

Principal Moderator Feedback

January 2011

GCE

GCE English Literature (6ET04)

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General Overview

It was a pleasure to moderate this unit, with many schools and colleges taking full advantage of the freedom it offers. As a result there was some truly investigative work in response to tasks that set out to challenge from the very outset. One such example is:

"Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size."

Does this presentation of women and men in the texts you have studied support Virginia Woolf's claim?

There is an extract from the work that responds to this challenge later in this report.

As always, the best work is evaluative and has an element of originality. Indeed, the only way that we can justify the continued use of coursework is if we use it to enable candidates to carry out individual research and pursue an independent line of enquiry - something that cannot be tested by examination alone.

As a result, the best tasks set up an investigation, often starting with a challenging proposition, and were clearly geared to the four equally weighted Assessment Objectives. Least satisfactory were the ones which saw the exercise as merely a comparison between books (tending therefore to foreground comparison at the expense of the other AOs); least satisfactory of all were the ones that required no more than a comparison between just two characters in just two books, treating them, not as literary constructs, ciphers or signifiers determined by their authors, but as real people.

Most folders took the single essay route; it was also pleasing to find a small but steady take up of the creative option, with some very interesting and readable results. One folder included an original short story to accompany a critical essay on Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife*, Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* and Angela Carter's *Book of Fairytales*. The story *The Mouse and the Spouse* is reproduced at the end of this report. Another student included original poetry written in the style of the Bronte sisters' 1846 collection of poetry before moving on to a critical essay on *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre* and *Agnes Grey*. Successful use is made of the creative approach when the original work itself is not too long, allowing scope for the critical essay to feed off it at the same time as fully developing points about the published texts under consideration.

Important reminder

The deadline for the receipt of work by the moderator is January 10th for the winter series and May 15th in the summer. There were a number of centres who failed to comply with the deadline this January. It is important to remind everyone that the punctual receipt of work is essential to guarantee that it can be processed in time for the publication of results.

Performance by Assessment Objectives

Some examples taken from work submitted for moderation in January 2011 are given below. It should be pointed out that the folders from which these extracts are taken have not been chosen because they received full marks, or reached grade A standard. They are not given as examples of absolute excellence. They do however illustrate points where a positive reward for a particular Assessment Objective is indicated

(which may or may not have been sustained in the work as a whole) even where there may be evident faults.

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

Here is a good example of what the centre describes as “sharp focus - defined argument” at the start of an essay on gothic texts. The full title was:

Consider the view that gothic texts explore the nightmarish terrors that lie beneath the orderly surface of the “civilised mind”.

Gothic novels often frighten and intrigue people by exploring the ‘unknown’. One of the most interesting and gripping things for an audience once they’ve identified with an ‘orderly’ - minded character, is the possibility of exploring these ‘unknown’ sides of themselves through these characters. It is therefore important when exploring what lies beneath the surface of a ‘civilised mind’, that one must look at the use of characters, language, form and structure that help authors achieve the exploration of these ‘nightmarish terrors.’

This is not a perfect introduction by any means. There are some insecurities in the grammar, especially around the use of singular and plural - an audience (singular) becomes themselves (plural). The contraction “they’ve” is a little colloquial - “they have” would probably read better in an essay. And the link between the possibility of exploring the unknown side of oneself through reading and the need to explore character, language, form and structure is not fully made clear (there is an implied point here that, only through discovering how a text works can one fully understand its unnerving ability to reveal the dark side of one’s own nature.)

It has promise however. There is a premise here that is going to be explored. The writer clearly knows about assessment objectives (AO2 is being diligently quoted in “language form and structure”). The contrast between what appears orderly on the surface but has something that lies suppressed beneath is an interesting one and works well with Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* and the screenplay of the 1994 film *Interview with a Vampire*, the chosen texts. The opening paragraph makes clear reference back to the title, even if it is a little wooden and self conscious in doing so.

A more confident approach is this opening of an essay on *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *To the Lighthouse*. The assignment title is a good one too and begins with a stimulating quotation for Virginia Woolf:

“Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the power of reflecting the figure of a man at twice its natural size.”

*Does the presentation of women and men in *To the Lighthouse* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* support Woolf’s claim?*

The essay starts:

Both Woolf and Williams show, in their respective novels, the influence that a woman can have on the self assurance of her partner. In the quotation above, Woolf suggests that this phenomenon can be applied to society as a whole; that men of all ranks, social positions and levels of intelligence benefit from the ‘looking glass’

through which they are projected by their female counterpart. Mrs Ramsay, for example, is a character created by Woolf to represent the humble, inoffensive female which was favoured by Victorian society. Similarly, Williams designs Stella as the obliging, hopelessly romantic victim of domestic abuse; in many ways she epitomises the often dependent nature of 'love' on which men such as Stanley and Mr Ramsey rely in order to retain their dominant position in a relationship. These 'feminine' characters are contrasted greatly by another female, this time a more independent, anti-traditionalist one. Lily and Blanche, respectively, represent the antithesis of Mrs Ramsey and Stella: they are the women who reject the expectations put upon them by society.

The purpose of these characters is two-fold. On the one hand, they exaggerate the characters of Mrs Ramsey and Stella...

This essay is off to a flying start and it is good to see characters being looked at as constructs - "created by" and "designed" by their authors. When the essay writes about "the purpose of these characters" it is the *writers'* purposes that are being considered. The style is fluent and graceful and there is a seemingly effortless link continuously made between the texts. Virginia Woolf's *Selected Diaries* was used as a third, illuminator text.

Moderator Comment:

AO1 is about finding a voice that is appropriate for the essay and following through a robust and relevant argument. To a greater or lesser degree both the above examples show this.

Moderator Tip:

Make it clear in your opening paragraph what you intend on doing. Find links between your texts from the start. A good way of doing this is to consider what the *writers* are doing (not just what the characters themselves happen to do.)

A note about word length:

A candidate who has failed to comply with the 2500-3000 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 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 3000 word limit has been reached.

Moderator Comment:

Writing within a given word limit is a "real life" skill. The essay needs to cover the four assessment objectives evenly within this space.

Moderator Tip:

Careful planning is essential if you are to get everything said within the required word limit. Go through your first draft carefully and see where you are addressing the assessment objectives. Remember all four are weighted equally so you will then see what needs to be cut down and what needs to be taken further.

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

The title of the essay from which this extract is taken is:

"It is about confrontation, rather than consolation...and how you will work the world into your own shape."

*In the light of this quotation, investigate how far mothers are presented as thwarting the development of their children in *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* with reference to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and the context of the societies in which they live.*

The essay:

In her interview with Jeanette Winterson, Lucasta Miller writes that "with extraordinary self-determination" Winterson "managed to evade the maternal eye". This courage to "work the world" into her "own shape" appears to be reflected in the style and structure that Winterson adopts throughout the novel. She includes numerous fairytale extracts, including the story of "Sir Percival" - such elements appear detached from the main body of text and so could represent Winterson's desire to break free from her mother's strict enforcement of Christian morals and practices. Such extracts become more frequent as the novel progresses - corresponding to Winterson's increasing strength and desire to "work the world" into her "own shape". Additionally, at the start of the novel in "Genesis", Winterson uses long paragraphs, whereas the structure towards the end of the novel is considerably more disjointed, with several paragraphs being only two lines long and with an increase in the amount of dialogue.

Moderator Comment:

This assessment objective can be responded to in many different ways, all of which involve a close scrutiny of your texts. You are looking at structure, form and language when looking at a writer's choice of an individual word, or the length and structure of a sentence, or how one chapter reflects on another, or how the ending of a play is structured to achieve its dramatic effects. In this example the essay is looking at the shape of a novel as a whole.

Moderator Tip:

The term, "the writer's craft" is very useful here. How has the text you are considering been crafted and shaped? In doing so you will need to use quotation from the texts - when you do this, always find something to say about the extract you have chosen to use.

AO3 - Explore connections and comparisons between different literary texts, informed by interpretations of other readers

This essay considers the presentation of villainy in *Othello*, *Richard III* and *Sweeney Todd*. It is a good example of where qualities that score marks for AO3 can also be judged under AO4 (context) as different possible readings of a text are explored (although in this case they are not really explored, only suggested). Again, this is not given as a model of excellence - a number of things could be improved such as the sweeping statements about Marxism and Feminism which need more textual back up. The idea of interpretation however is here, though there is the danger, mentioned elsewhere in this report, of treating characters as real people.

"Could Richard and Iago have been stopped, if women had been heard?" is an interesting question about character and situation; the argument could be developed further however - to what extent does Shakespeare focus on the unheeded voices of women in his plays? Lip service only is paid to Marxism and it may be that using such broad terms is not particularly helpful unless they are fully understood and explored.

It seems that social structure in the 15th century forced many to act above their positions in order to do right. Marxists argue that all men should be equal so it follows that no man should seek a higher status. They blame social inequality for the existence of villainy, but surely it is the man himself who decides his fate. Richard for example, riving with overwhelming ambition, can only do wrong as he works to gain the acknowledgement he believes he deserves. Does this make him a villain though, or is it the failure of other characters to challenge him? Richard is allowed to be a villain. No-one in these literary examples is able to stop his murderous plots from unfolding. There is some attempt by the women, Queen Margaret especially, to warn others - "that bottled spider, whose deadly web ensnareth thee about". Shakespeare cleverly uses this metaphorical expression to liken Richard to a spineless creature, which we as a modern audience, associate by default with horror and fear. Shakespeare also uses this device in Othello, when Iago tells that he will "ensnare as great a fly as Cassio". This begs the question: could Richard and Iago have been stopped, if women had been heard? Feminists agree that if they were not placed in a patriarchal society, their warning would have been heeded. It can be argued then that the failure of society to stop him is what allowed Richard to murder whomever he pleased, in order to become king. Once powerful, he would never have to prove his worth to others again.

The extract that follows addresses the AO more confidently. It is from an essay on how audiences are disturbed through watching the plays *The Tempest*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Pinter's *Homecoming*. "Other readers" are not named in this extract, or labeled as Feminists or Marxists, but it is clear from the lucid argument and fluent way in which the plays are compared, that the texts are being considered as open to interpretation.

When Tennessee Williams brings Stella and Stanley together at the end, mirroring the first reunion, the meeting is very different. Again he is positioned kneeling by Stella but the bond has gone, "[Stella] sobs with inhuman abandon ... He kneels beside her and his fingers find the opening of her blouse." The audience is left with a feeling of deep disappointment in the actions of Stanley and is uncomfortable because his motives seem simply sexual and inappropriate. The audience is also disturbed by the coexistence of brutality and intimacy in this relationship which is far from being resolved at the end of the play.

*The idea of two extremes of human nature is explored by Shakespeare in an equally disturbing way in *The Tempest*. The contrasting characters of Ariel and Caliban show two opposites. On one hand we have the representation of man in his animalistic, basic nature, one controlled by instinct and physicality. Here he is described by Prospero:*

*"I have used thee
(Filth as thou art) with human care and lodged thee
In mine own cell, till though didst seek to violate
The honour of my child."*

*The idea is that, even though Caliban had the option of becoming a better human being, he chose the brutish side of human nature. On the other hand Shakespeare creates the character of Ariel, who, we can assume, is meant to represent the spiritual and imaginative side to man. Certainly Shakespeare's choice of name for these two characters would suggest this - Caliban as an anagram of Cannibal and Ariel suggesting air. We must not take these stereotyping names at face value, however. Shakespeare has given them their names, but has he not done so through the mind of Prospero? It is Prospero who defines Caliban as a cannibal and "filth" after his attempt to violate Miranda. Ariel is a "tricksy spirit" but his light, tricksy, spiritual nature is only Prospero's description of a creature that obeys him to the letter (Ariel is a "malignant thing" when he asks for freedom in Act 1 scene 2). The idea of goodness and evil, the light and dark in human nature is therefore open to question: the play leaves us disturbed and questioning. Is Prospero a tyrant or an benevolent despot? How can we reconcile his brutal treatment of Caliban with his loving - but equally controlling - treatment of Miranda? How can the would-be rapist Caliban be capable of such fine sensibilities as expressed in his "isle is full of noises" speech? Just as *The Homecoming* leaves the audience with the disturbing "reconciliation" scene with Stella and Stanley, *The Tempest* leaves us with Prospero's forgiving Sebastian and Antonio but with Sebastian's muttered aside "The devil speaks in him" - we are left to speculate uncomfortably on how things will turn out on the return to Milan just as we are left wondering what will happen in the future to the marriage of Stanley and Stella.*

Moderator Comment:

AO3 is about (a) comparing and contrasting your texts and (b) being open to different interpretations. It is important you demonstrate both sides of this assessment objective.

Moderator Tip:

Both these examples use the technique of asking rhetorical questions - questions which do not expect a reply precisely because there is no real, one answer. It is a technique that can be done badly or over-done (here, the second example uses it better than the first). Even if these questions do not appear as such in your final version they are questions you could write down at the planning stage.

AO4 - Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received

This is the beginning of an essay on post colonialism, language and identity in Friel's *Translations* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The third text is a composite of various critical and cultural essays on colonialism and post colonialism. The title is:

*To what extent, and how effectively, are the views of the colonised and the coloniser reflected in *Things Fall Apart* and *Translations*?*

The essay:

"But I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. I believe...they are happier...more comfortably fed and lodged under our rule than they ever were. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins...are as white as ours."

*The above is an extract taken from a letter penned in 1860 by the English novelist Charles Kingsley as he travelled in Ireland. In four short lines we are presented with an Englishman's view of colonialism's role in taming the world's "savage" peoples. It is only through responses to colonialism, such as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Friel's *Translations* that a voice is finally returned to the colonised. Both works present the devastating and invasive nature of colonialism from inside a pre-existent and long established culture, working to show a colonised people "in human terms what happened to them, what they lost" (Prospective Commitment in African Literature George D Nyamndi). It is said that history is written by the victors, a literary tradition that Achebe and Friel seek to reverse.*

Moderator Comment:

This opening gives the reader the feel of a lively and outspoken essay that is likely to follow it. The opening quotation from Charles Kingsley is provocative and the essay sets out its aims clearly and speaks from a position of well researched authority.

Responding to context is not about reproducing facts about historical and social conditions. It is about being aware of how writing and reading are deeply affected by the contexts in which they happen. The quotation at the beginning of this essay shows us how accepted norms influence what is written and how unacceptable these assumed normalities become over time.

Moderator Tip:

A quotation, like the one used at the beginning of this essay, can really set the tone of your essay. Here the essay makes it clear that the topic has been well researched and that texts are not going to be accepted at face value.

Marks and grades

Most centres are aware of the difference between raw marks and UMS marks (if not there is a helpful guide on www.edexcel.com, or use Ask the Expert to ask a more specific question). The specification (on page 44) gives details of minimum uniform marks (UMS marks) required for each grade at each unit, but these only relate to the fixed 80%=A, 70%=B, etc. UMS scale. The actual raw marks out of 80 and it is important to realise these can change from one examination series to the next, depending on the quality of the work seen. That apart, the A boundary of 70 raw marks and the E boundary of 36 is the same this January series as it was last January. As there can be no guarantee that this will apply in the future however it is important to assess by the criteria (pages 40 and 41 of the specification) rather than attempt to pre-judge the grade.

The fact that the UMS mark and the raw mark are both out of 80 can lead to confusion on results day (when raw marks may appear to have been adjusted down when in fact they have not) so it is important that both teachers and candidates are aware of this.

Popular topics and texts

Plays were popular, with schools and colleges often wanting to "revisit" Shakespeare, or to explore modern plays that are not available elsewhere on the syllabus. A school in Colombo chose the Sri Lankan author Shyam Sevadurai, showing that selecting a text with a local or regional interest can often work very well. Schools sometimes chose texts which are on the set book list for exams but which have not been studied by the candidates themselves - this is quite acceptable - or chose another book by an author whose work was being studied for an exam. It is not acceptable, however, to use texts "that have previously been assessed in any other

unit" (as stated on page 35 of the Specification). Using texts that will be assessed in Unit 3 is also unacceptable as it would lead to a narrow range of texts being studied, defeat the object of coursework and not comply with the overarching regulation that at least three texts must be studied for each unit.

An example of a piece of work, using the creative option

A very sound critical essay on Duffy's *The World's Wife*, Atwood's *The Penelopiad* and Carter's *Book of Fairytales* followed this original short story. At 600 words it is just about the *maximum* number of words one would want to see for the creative element.

It is reproduced here partly because it is a pleasure to read in its own right and makes a fitting celebratory end to this report, but also in case teachers or students would like to speculate about the various ways it could be exploited in a critical essay on feminist texts that would follow it in a Unit 4 folder.

The Mouse and the Spouse

The first time he truly saw me was in the ink department. He saw me transform his sketches from nothing and was captivated. He couldn't help himself. I breathed life into those drawings. I gave them their character. Just like I did with Walt.

I was always there for him. The Dutiful Wife. I cared for him. Loved him. And he loved me. He loved me for what I did for him. But then again, he didn't really have a choice. He poured his life and soul into those drawings. It wasn't the cancer that consumed him. Or his vices. It was me. Well. Me and Mickey.

When he first showed me that mouse, I laughed. Only because I saw something nobody else saw. Walt. His large ears and cheeky grin. They were one and the same. The kind man I fell in love with was visible in that drawing. But Walt couldn't see it. The mouse was introduced to me as Mortimer. A small black and white sketch on a scrap of paper. I responded accordingly. Mortimer? Did he really have so little sense to suggest *that* for the audiences we were trying to appeal to? And I told him so. "Sissy" was the word I used. So it was changed. He became Mickey. I painted him. I gave him his little red shorts with gold buttons. The white gloves and shoes. The elements that everybody loved. But that is what destroyed Walt.

It first started when we left the studio together one evening and he started drinking with a cancer stick perpetually in his hand. He acted as though he could afford it. It angered me. Now I see it was how he felt about Mickey and I. He couldn't stand it. But then again neither could I. Whisky after whisky was poured and drunk which he claimed "saved his sanity". How ironic. I finally realised how far I had pushed him. The tempers, the tiredness, the shakes. He communicated less with me. His iron words were not his own. He ended up having to go away. I was asked to go with him by his doctors but I couldn't. How could I leave the studio? Nobody else was able to continue the work. It had to be me.

I saw it coming. The cancer. But that wasn't what killed him. The final straw was a little boy. An innocent child. A child who saw Walt at a movie showing and asked him to draw Mickey. Walt admitted he didn't draw him any more. The boy asked about the jokes and story lines. Walt had to confess he didn't do that either. The boy then asked a question that Walt never forgot. "So what do you actually do Mr Disney?" It tore him apart.

Even after days in hospital, I thought he would recover. I refused to see his sunken skin and hollow cheeks. His papery skin and whiskered cheeks revolted me. I couldn't meet his lifeless stare. I couldn't admit to what I had done. Every time he came in

and saw Mickey on the screen he would turn away. I heard him say on his final day at the studio "I never want to see those monsters again."

I kept his wishes for the business and did everything he asked. At the opening of Walt Disney World Resort his brother Roy gave his dedication to Walt and then I was invited on the stage. With Mickey Mouse. The applause was stupendous. The throbbing in my ears has never stopped. Hand in hand with Mickey Mouse. It felt like I was finally being acknowledged. The true creator of Disney.

Grade Boundaries

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