

Examiners' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

January 2013

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

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General Overview

This series found centres submitting work on a remarkable range of texts and topics. As always the best work seemed to come as a result of tasks which provoked an investigative response. Consider this title:

'There she weaves by night and day

A magic web with colours gay...'

Compare and contrast how the writers of 'The Yellow Wallpaper', 'Mrs Dalloway' and 'The Hours' have continued to interpret the theme of entrapment to depict women.

With the caveat that the student concerned has not written, or is not going to write, on 'The Yellow Wallpaper' for the Unit 1 exam (and a reminder of this would have made in the E9 report to the centre) this seems a splendid title, providing rich opportunities for context with the idea of how writers have 'continued to interpret' the theme of entrapment. The result was an impressive essay with the candidate making the woeful observation that a chronological reading reveals how little progress has been made in women's liberation.

Context was nicely caught in another title from another centre which suggested that 'Paradise Lost' and 'The Rape of the Lock' *express both the political and social conventions of their authors and the times and conventions of their writing.* The third text comprised critical reading. Here was a title which encouraged the candidate to step away from merely exploring content to see what the writers themselves are doing, and, in particular, the way the prevailing zeitgeist has mediated their response.

A title which invited the candidate to take issue with the conventional labelling of writers was this: *Although Blake, Wordsworth and Keats are described as 'romantic poets', there is as much that divides them as unites them.* This kind of task also works well with other groupings - novels labelled as 'Gothic', poets as 'Metaphysical' and plays as 'kitchen sink' - investigating easy assumptions that writers who have perhaps one thing in common can conveniently be bundled together, so foregrounding their obvious similarities but masking subtle differences.

'Character is Fate' is a theme that appears in different ways, as here: *How do the protagonists lead to their own destruction and demise in 'Othello', 'A Streetcar named Desire' and 'Isabella and the pot of Basil', and how do we respond to this portrayal as 21st century readers / audiences?* In this case Keats' 'Isabella' worked very well alongside the plays and it was interesting to find this crossover of genres. The possible danger in this task is that essays will be about characters rather than authors; but the *how do we respond to this portrayal?* Part of the question steers the student away from a character driven response. And making the candidate aware of him or herself as a twentieth century reader or audience is good practice for the Unit 3 exam where this reminder appears alongside every set book essay question 'Note that you should demonstrate what it means to be considering texts as a modern reader, in a modern context, and that other readers at other times may well have had other responses.'

The range of texts was impressive too and a list of these appears later in this report. Some texts brought together made for interesting synthesis: *Can fantasy ever truly be an escape from reality? - An exploration of illusion in Tennessee Williams' 'A Streetcar Named Desire' and Ibsen's 'A Doll's House' considered alongside a range of critical reviews.* Synthesis is a top grade quality listed in the Assessment Criteria: it happens when an essay manages to come up with something that appears imaginative and original in bringing together texts and ideas – almost as if it is happening in this essay for the first time ever.

One essay, from a centre that regularly enters excellent folders on the theme of colonialism, using 'Translations', 'Things Fall Apart' and a range of other texts, began with a familiar quote: 'The sun never set on the British Empire, because God did not trust the b- in the dark'; clever use was made of this starting point to establish an ironic perspective. Another, from a centre that invariably impresses by clearly having negotiated a set of tasks with its students, corresponding to their interests, aptitudes and abilities, began, 'When in 1921 Ludwig Wittgenstein asserted "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" he implied the existence of a hitherto ineffable realm beyond ordinary linguistic perception available to a privileged few.' This was their highest scoring folder.

Examiner's Comment:

Tasks which set up an idea which can be challenged, or offer something provocative, can lead to investigative essays which often do very well.

Examiner's Tip:

From the start of the essay set out to explore and demonstrate something. Perhaps use a quotation from a critic as a starting point. Avoid being merely descriptive, or producing something that treats characters as if they were real people.

Overlap between set books and texts chosen for coursework

There are a few points to bear in mind here:

- Candidates 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.
- Candidates 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.
- Candidates 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 GCE 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 January 2013 submission.

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

Essays usually start by defining their terms. Sometimes this can be done very woodenly – ‘In this essay I shall be looking at identity. The dictionary defines identity as...’

This essay has the title: *The search for one's own identity is rarely centred entirely on the self. What factors contribute to the character's sense of self in the texts you have studied in class and independently: Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein (1818)', James Joyce's 'A Little Cloud' (1906) from 'Dubliners' (1914) and Brian Friel's 'Translations'(1980)?*

The idea of attaining a true 'sense of one's self' repeatedly resonates from classical to modern literature and certainly features in the way three chosen writers have presented their characters in the texts studied which span nearly two centuries.

Examiner's Comment:

A clear opening relates to the title and shows that the essay is on track for a robust argument relevant to the question.

Examiner's Tip:

Don't go for heavy handed pedantic definitions. Use your title as a launching pad. Here the candidate is aware that the texts chosen cover a wide span of years and makes it clear that they have been chosen wisely, for a specific reason.

A note for teachers and assessors about word length:

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 moderators 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.

In 'Paradise Lost', Milton claims that he 'intends to soar above the Aeonian mount' suggesting that he must go further than classical convention to understand and expound the ways of God.... Alexander Pope in the 'Rape of the Lock' gives us an invocation is typically diminished. Instead of the classical muse or the Holy

*Spirit, Pope starts directly – ‘This verse to Caryll, Muse! Is due’.
Just as with events, so with inspirers: matters are scaled down.*

Examiner’s Comment:

A neat point is being made here about the invocation or address with which both poems – Milton’s ‘Paradise Lost’ and Pope’s ‘The Rape of the Lock’ begin. Both quotations are incorporated within the candidate’s sentence rather than being set out separately in order to assist the flow of the argument.

Examiner’s Tip:

It is a good idea to use fairly short quotation and use it to advance an argument, rather than present it as a chunk on the page. Here a really neat comparison has been made, which also deserves credit under AO3.

In this example a student is writing about John Osborne’s ‘Look Back in Anger’, alongside other 1950s plays and uses Jimmy’s attack on Alison’s family background to explore the way that plays address the class struggle:

‘Yes, that’s the little woman’s family. You know Mummy and Daddy, of course. And don’t let the Marquess of Queensbury manner fool you. They’ll kick you in the groin while you’re handing your hat to the maid.’

In this speech Jimmy shows his anger by the contrast of language. The Marquess of Queensbury rules are the rules for fair play in boxing and Jimmy is contrasting the world of rules and polite behaviour with the raw reality of kicking someone ‘in the groin’ (a slightly euphemistic statement which, if the play were being written today, might have been made more crudely). The sarcastic use of Mummy and Daddy is also an example of class based lexis.

Osborne has also made Jimmy’s speech, bitter though it is, have a certain lyricism to it. There is a sense of rhythm and balance in the sentence ‘They’ll kick you in the groin while handing your hat to the maid’ and the juxtaposition of these two images has a startling effect on the audience (especially the audience of 1956).

Examiner’s Comment:

When using quotation, this student unpicks it. It is well chosen and illustrates the point about the class struggle very efficiently.

Examiner’s Tip:

Don’t use quotation simply to back up a point you have made about the plot. This is simply saying the same thing twice. Select carefully – look at the point made in this example about the rhythm and balance in the sentence that juxtaposes two startling images. You may be used to writing in detail about lines of poetry like this – but things like rhythm and lyricism are to be found in plays and novels too.

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*.

This extract comes from an essay which considers the proposition *It is essential that the villain in a Gothic text is foreign*. The texts considered were 'Dracula', 'Wuthering Heights' and 'Jane Eyre'.

Emily Bronte's 'Jane Eyre' is also seen to explore the fear of the foreign through the character of Bertha Mason. Bertha a 'Jamaican creole' is a foreigner bringing havoc into the civilised British life of Jane. Bertha can be seen as the symbol of those oppressed in the colonies and their anger towards the colonialists. During the time of the novel British society held great prejudice against other races, out of the fear of being overthrown as one of the great powers of the world. Bronte began writing 'Jane Eyre' eight years after the emancipation of the British West Indian slaves. At this time the recent British participation with slavery was a controversial topic amongst society. In the novel Rochester associated Bertha with 'madness' because of her race, making her character more villainous. Rochester comments on the 'fiery West Indian' area in which Bertha grew up and links her Creole blood with the idea of madness. Through the use of the word 'fiery' her character seems more out of place and she is split apart from the British characters.

However an alternative viewpoint shows Bertha to be a victim and Mr Rochester the real unacknowledged villain. Rochester represents the oppressor that is Britain; oppressing Bertha for not being passive, which also highlights Bertha's so called unacceptable character through her sexuality.

The centre's comment on this essay overall (which, when one has read the whole essay, seems a very fair one) goes as follows:

The response meets the top band criteria in many respects, particularly in consideration of context and narrative technique. The essay is hampered by problematic written expression in places but construction of clear arguments is evident and these explore some interesting alternative interpretations. As a result the marks given were highest for AO3 and AO4 (16 and 17 out of 20 respectively).

Although this is only a short extract it is probably clear that fluent expression is not the candidate's strongest point and the argument moves rather woodenly. Contextual knowledge and openness to different interpretation is nevertheless in evidence.

Examiner's Comment:

Unless the third text is specifically literary criticism (in which case specific reference to that criticism is required) 'interpretations of other readers' can be met by showing an awareness of different possible interpretations without necessarily naming critics. It would have been good to see this candidate engage a little more with the idea however – where does s/he stand with regard to Mr Rochester? Is he a hero or a villain?

Examiner's Tip:

Avoid plodding through contextual fact and listing alternative points of view in a dull and unengaged way. Let your reader know how you personally interpret the texts in the light of the evidence you have been considering.

Choices of topics and texts

Centres might find it helpful to know what others are doing. Here are some of the texts from January 2013 (in no particular order). Titles in italics also appear on the set book lists for exams: if using them (and there is no problem with this) centres will have been reminded via the E9 reports that they should not be used for both coursework and examinations.

Plays:

Antony & Cleopatra
King Lear
The Tempest
Macbeth
Julius Caesar
Richard 11
Richard 111
The Taming of the Shrew
Antigone
Translations
A Streetcar Named Desire
Cat on a Hot Tin Roof
Top Girls
Chicken Soup with Barley
Look Back in Anger
A Doll's House
Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?
The Caucasian Chalk Circle
Abigail's Party
The Crucible

Novels/Short Stories:

Mrs Dalloway
The Hours
Bleak House
Snow Falling on Cedars
Emma
The Go Between
1984
Brave New World

The Catcher in the Rye
The Perks of being a Wallflower
A Clockwork Orange
I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream
The Women's Room
The Witches of Eastwick
The Fellowship of the Ring (from The Lord of the Rings)
Jane Eyre
Dracula
The Handmaid's Tale
The French Lieutenant's Woman
Pride & Prejudice
Sense & Sensibility
Things Fall Apart
The Return of the Native
Enduring Love
The Name of the Rose
House of Leaves (Danielewski)
Fictions (Borges)
Robinson Crusoe
The Life of Pi
Concrete Island (Ballard)
Portrait of the Artist
Ulysses
Tess of the d'Urbervilles
A Thousand Splendid Suns
Good Morning Midnight
The Snow Child
The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County
Alias Grace
On the Road
The Yellow Wallpaper
A Tale of Two Cities
The Belljar
Frankenstein
Funny Boy (Selvadurai)
Swimming in the Monsoon Sea (Selvadurai)
The Girl at the Lion d'Or

Poetry:

Paradise Lost
The Rape of the Lock
Blake (selection)
Wordsworth (selection)
Keats (Isabella and other poems)
The Franklin's Tale
Heaney (selection)
The Waste Land
Harrison (selection)
Plath (selection)

Examiner's Comment:

Here is a wonderful range of possible texts, some of which have been taught and others which students have found for themselves.

Examiner's Tip:

I cannot promise that every one of these texts produced a brilliant essay. Candidates need to use texts that make sense to them personally, with a task that enables to explore and investigate. It does not matter whether they are taught or whether found themselves – both approaches in my experience, and the experience of other moderators, can work equally well.

Conclusion

Here are some key reminders for candidates and their teachers:

- Please send the work on time – January 10th and May 15th are the dates by which it should have reached the moderator (and not just be put in the post).
- Send the top copy of the OPTEMS to Edexcel/Pearson in Hellaby, the pink one to your moderator and keep the bottom one for your own records.
- 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.
- 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.
- Please ensure that you read the E9 (Report to Centre) available on Edexcel Online. There have been some very full and helpful reports submitted by moderators.
- 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:

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