

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2014

Pearson Edexcel GCE
in English Literature Unit 2
(6ET02/01)

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Task-setting

Task setting is now much more consonant with what is required to enable students to cover all of the Assessment Objectives, especially both parts of AO3 - the second part of which is now more frequently addressed by students.

For the explorative study most students wrote coherently and sustained a comparison between texts. As in previous series, a few wrote about one text followed by the second with a few comparisons made at the start and end. Some students – usually the most able - engaged with critical opinions and disputed with them or incorporated them into their own argument; less able students quoted opinions, sometimes randomly, or irrelevantly, or included it as part of their own sentence and moved on. Many incorporated a sense of debate.

Favoured Shakespeare titles included 'Antony and Cleopatra', 'Hamlet', 'Othello', and 'The Merchant of Venice', 'Macbeth', 'King Lear', Measure for Measure 'and 'Much Ado...'. This year 'Twelfth Night', 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' and 'The Taming of The Shrew' were popular, but comedies in general are chosen less often. For comparison very many offered 'Dr Faustus', 'The Duchess of Malfi', 'Tis Pity She's a Whore' and 'The Rover' as well as 'The School For Scandal'. This year, as was the case last session, saw some interesting pieces on more effective pairings of 'Othello' and 'The Merchant of Venice'. As previously many students opted for arguments about the women in some of these texts, favourites being The Duchess, Lady Macbeth, Lady Macduff, The Three Witches, Ophelia, Gertrude, Emilia, Desdemona, Bianca, Hero and Beatrice.

The creative submission was often handled more confidently by the full range of students. Most understood what was required so that they were able to capture an appropriate register and had an appropriate sense of audience. Many were persuasive and were written with enthusiasm and clear engagement. Many were humorous and witty and used a range of rhetorical devices. There was a variety of approaches, ranging from blogs, letters to a newspaper, letters/notes as a writer/director, a critical review of a performance or film, a comparison between a film and a performance, an interview with an actor/director/the writer, an update for a television programme or performance, a phone-in with a writer/actor/director/ being the writer him/herself writing a diary/letters and many more.

The following comments on task-setting were made by moderators this series:

- As ever, tasks are crucial. There were some interesting texts this year, and unusual combinations. I have not seen work on *Titus Andronicus* before, for example, and I saw other Explorative Study tasks on Roman plays, on History plays as well as the old favourites. There were some intriguing takes on androgyny and cross-dressing, with reference to *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*. Ubiquitous, as ever, is 'the tragic hero', where Shakespeare is berated for his lack of obedience to an Ancient Greek whose work he had never read. Refreshingly, however, there were not too many, though there were still too many centres who rely on character-based tasks which does restrict the students, especially as they can link texts only via character or narrative.

- Where the Creative Critical Response tasks had been carefully set by the centre and not simply the same task for all students the results were far more 'creative' and the students were able to demonstrate their ability to sustain the chosen voice. The more successful tasks make the audience and purpose clear from the start.
- Some centres set one task, leading at times to cloned responses, while in others there was evidence of extensive research and wide reading by students who produced lengthy bibliographies and whose essays began by addressing the question and 'How far...' they agreed with the proposition, with continuous comparison/contrast as the focus of their essay. Many essays and especially the creative pieces were witty, funny and clever and there were some original or new insights in the explorative studies.
- Texts chosen were appropriately demanding and there were a good number of centres in which a range of tasks was set in line with the requirements of AO3 asking "To what extent/How far do you agree...?" Some centres had tried to match student ability to task. Some set only one title per task. There were in addition, some questions for the first task, which focussed too much on AO2 and AO4. Some had titles beginning 'Discuss' or 'Outline' or 'Explore' Some simply had a heading/title. Some gave no hint of the task being addressed.

Students' performance

There were a few folders which fell significantly short of the total recommended word count, but the greater concern was for the larger minority that exceeded the word count, sometimes significantly. This resulted in answers that tended to lose shape and focus. In the Explorative Studies the force of the argument was diluted and the impact of the analysis tended to be weakened (AO3). In the Creative Critical Response the persuasive element needed for high marks for AO1 was lost. In the most problematic the writing became an essay rather than a well-crafted response to a specified task with a purpose and an audience.

Connections between texts are handled better than they were earlier in the life of the specification, though there are still candidate folders where there was barely a link made, except perhaps a fleeting mention at the beginning and end of the essay. Sometimes there was a great imbalance in the time devoted to each text, which means it was really not possible to make links of any substance. Balance is also important for the 'other readers' part of AO3: some centres seemed to condone or even encourage swamping numbers of critics quoted even when this was to the detriment of the student's own interpretation. As one moderator put it, 'At one extreme would be a patchwork of critics with little sense of where the student was placed in all this, and at the other no acknowledgement at all of any possible alternative view'.

Another moderator wrote: 'The Creative Critical Responses can be wonderful – imaginative, humorous, truly creative. I saw some excellent examples this time. However, a number of 'Portia's diary' or 'An Interview with Prospero' crept in. There were many reviews, and some were fine, but many did not specify the context, which does the student a disservice. If all the students in a centre do the same Creative Critical Response task, it seems to deny its nature. Of course,

there were some centres which permitted no choice of task for either the Creative Critical Response or the Explorative Study, and that often led to formulaic answers where the students wrote template answers. This does make it harder for students to achieve the highest bands.'

Administration

Many of the administration errors mentioned in previous reports were repeated in this series:

- The top and bottom candidates were missing from the sample. Centres should be aware that these candidates' folders need to be included in addition to the ones starred on the OPTEMS form.
- The top copy of the OPTEMS form should be sent to Pearson Assessments at the Hellaby address; the yellow copy goes to the moderator.
- All additions should be checked before the sample leaves the centre – in some cases candidates had been awarded a significant number of marks fewer than were written on their work.
- Some candidates still do not include a bibliography with their work, though this is a specification requirement
- So too is a cumulative word count on each page of a candidate's folder.

Assessment issues

The following points were made by moderators regarding assessment:

- I saw far more examples this year of overlong folders. Some students wrote 2,600 to 2,700 words, without any sort of comment from the teacher. In some centres the total word count was fine, but the balance between Explorative Study and Creative Critical Response was awry. It can disadvantage students when they take 200 or 250 words off the Explorative Study and add it to the Creative Critical Response.
- Annotations were often full and thorough, though some centres provide none at all. The combination of summative and formative is really important in understanding the reasons for awarding the marks, and some teachers provide one or the other but not both. There were a number of folders in which there was extensive internal moderation but this could lead to a lack of clarity in the marks awarded since they often crossed out more than once so that it was hard to decipher what the consensus mark was. It is also difficult to see the reasoning in centres where a mark is changed and there is nothing to say why: sometimes these are quite big changes of 4 or 5 marks.
- Once again there were some scripts which showed little evidence of having been read/assessed making it difficult to work out why a particular mark had been awarded. There were instances of annotations in letters and numbers, not in words, without any indication of the level being achieved and, sometimes, there would, in the same centre, be scripts annotated in detail clearly by a different tutor. Reading 'AO3' in a margin is especially perplexing as there is no indication of which strand is being noticed by the assessor. Some scripts are still being annotated as 'AO2'

when the student had quoted from the text[s] but had not analysed the quotation.

- However, some centres had annotated their students' scripts in detail, had made helpful summative comments tied to the AOs and showed clear evidence of internal moderation and, sometimes, debate among several tutors.
- There are still centres where the summative comments are simply reproduced from the assessment grids and a few centres who simply reproduce the grids and underline what they feel are the appropriate descriptors.

Examples of students' work

Explorative Study

'An Ineluctable Evil in Man'- an exploration of the presentation of good and evil in Macbeth and Measure for Measure.

In both of these plays we see 'corruption boil and bubble/ Til it o'errun the stew' (5.1) combatted by the 'single-minded moral purity' of characters like Isabella in Measure: 'evil continually contends with good'. The moral implications of good and evil are one of Shakespeare's primary concerns, morality being a vital issue at the time when these plays were written, thanks to society's preoccupations with religion, which were increased still more by James 1st rigorously God-centred rule. Though modern audiences might not have such an awareness of the spiritual overtones of the plays, they can still involve themselves in the 'two sides (of good and evil) battling for control' over the character's actions, all leading to the ultimate question, relevant to every period of history: will good triumph over evil?

As Angelo says in Act V of Measure, women are 'instruments of some more mightier member that sets them on'; spiritual forces control and inhabit Lady Macbeth and Isabella, determining them as either evil or good. Lady Macbeth's imploring of the spirits to 'fill (her)...(with) direst cruelty' (1.5) and her visual transformation in this passage into a creature of malign evil, shown in her commands to 'make thick (her) blood', and remove her 'women's breasts' are extremely shocking to the audience. Lady Macbeth's inhuman welcoming of evil goes against every moral code we have- both in the 16th century and now. In a stark contrast to Lady Macbeth's undiluted evil, Isabella appears to be pure goodness- her status as a nun and a 'virtuous maid' (2.2) are stamps of righteous authenticity, particularly in Shakespeare's religiously dominated world. But in Isabella, Shakespeare was subverting this traditional image of purity. Although Isabella gains moral high ground in the 'language' of heaven and mercy that she uses to persuade Angelo in 2.2, she later loses it in her selfish anger at Claudio: 'I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death' (3.1), preferring her chastity to his salvation. Through Isabella's dilemma- her brother's life or her virginity- Shakespeare explores the boundaries between god and evil, questioning the accepted Christian values in his society and showing that Isabella's position as a religious figure does not

make her immune to selfishness- a form of evil. Shakespeare could also be commenting on a current issue in the 16th century- the form of evil. Shakespeare could also be commenting on a current issue in the 16th century- the dissolution of the monasteries which showed that the public's traditional respect for the Holy Orders was waning. Was Shakespeare indicating his support of this change in perspective? Andrew Gibson goes so far as to say that Macbeth 'links evil with large imaginative resources', suggesting that Shakespeare portrays evil as more effective and exiting to the audience than good. This is evidenced in the contrast in success of Isabella and Lady Macbeth's persuasion of men in the plays: Lady Macbeth wins her argument, persuading Macbeth to kill Duncan (1.7), however Isabella's 'reason and discourse' (1.2), do not have the desired effect on Angelo, who is seduced by her 'speechless' dialect' rather than her pleas for Claudio's life. Is Shakespeare depicting evil as more effective and powerful as good?

Because of the pernicious desires that she awakens in Angelo, Isabella could be seen as an unintentionally evil force, whose strength of physical attraction is responsible for Angelo's fall from 'precise' (3.1) perfection to a lustful creature, who gives his 'sensual race the rein' (2.4). Lady Macbeth's evil yet 'magnetic' power, however, is the deliberate catalyst for Macbeth's spiral of tyranny. Both Angelo and Macbeth hide their evil: Angelo is 'outward sainted' (3.1) and Macbeth declares that 'false face must hide what the...heart doth know' (1.7). While both men express the inevitability of their progression of evil: 'when once our grace we have forgot/ Nothing goes right' (4.4 Measure) Angelo's wickedness is secret until the last act, whereas Macbeth's murders steadily gain publicity, until he is known to all as a 'tyrant, bloody-sceptered' (4.3). Macbeth's tyrannous rule and Angelo's hypocrisy (condemning Claudio to death for a sin he himself wants to commit) combine in Shakespeare's criticism of the exploitation of power, used by rulers throughout history as an excuse for their evil. The fact that Macbeth's and Angelo's sin is deliberate and purposeful underlines their corruption and makes the audience unable to sympathise with them. As Charles Spencer wrote, 'Macbeth always understood the consequences of killing' and his choice to kill despite his awareness of his evil in doing so accentuates his villainy. Thanks to the scheming of the Duke, Angelo never acts on his evil desires, and according to Isabella, this excuses him from the punishment that his foul mind would normally result in. His desire 'must be buried as an intent' (5.1). According to the play, Angelo's wicked thoughts give him his 'natural edge' (1,4)- he is rendered human by the final balance of good and evil in his temperament: 'they say the best men are moulded out of faults' (5.1). However, a 21st century audience could see this pardoning and positive outcome as unsatisfactory- our modern focus on psychology cultivates and equal weighting of the seriousness of desire and deed, and we might believe that Angelo still deserves retribution for his evil intentions.

Another pair of corresponding characters in the two plays that are still more ambiguous, refusing to be categorized as either evil or good, are Malcom and the Duke. As the rulers of the societies at the end of both plays, their equivocacy reflects the turbulent period of uncertainty that

surrounded James 1st's ascension to the throne (at the time that Shakespeare wrote Measure) . In his proposal to Isabella, the Duke mirrors the iniquity of Angelo: they are 'two sides a corrupt coin'. Malcom also echoes the violence of his evil predecessor as he holds up Macbeth's head (in the Rupert Goold production, 2010). Both Malcom and the Duke admit their weaknesses and say they are unfit to rule- Malcom lists all the evil tendencies that disqualify him from ruling in Act 4 Scene 3- but this apparent humility is actually a secret test of the loyalty of their deputies. Though unseen, they are still very much in authority and both show and almost god-like self-assurance as they take control at the end of the plays. The Duke takes the character of a Friar: but is this outward holiness only a 'seemer's' (1.3) garb intended to bring him closer to Isabella? We see no evidence for either Malcom or Duke resolving the problems of their kingdoms at the end of the plays. Simon McBurney writes 'in Measure, Shakespeare appears to accept that we will never know whether they are fully evil'. With the advent of a new ruler, the play reverts back to the start and the audience is unsure whether the play's events will repeat themselves, showing the cyclical nature of human evil, or whether the state of the kingdom will change for the better.

Both plays illustrate the truth of the inevitability of evil in humanity. Perfect Angelo falls, even righteous Isabella becomes angry and violent. But while wickedness is evident in all characters to some extent, it is debatable whether this evil is a product of original sin (a key belief for Shakespearian audiences) or a result of the provocations of others. Lady Macbeth and Isabella influence Angelo and Macbeth through their persuasion, spurring them on to wicked decisions. In addition to this, there are two major sources of evil in both plays: the witches in Macbeth and the brothel in Measure. The witches work in partnership with Lady Macbeth: both calling on the 'dunest smoke of hell" (1.5) and "metaphysical aid" (1.5) to entice Macbeth into the belief in the witches prophecies and a lust for power. In a grotesque inversion, " fair is foul, foul is fair" (1.1) for both Lady Macbeth and the witches: evil is beneficial and good is maleficent. The witches' diabolical evil is the driving force of the play, pushing the Macbeths to destruction in 'the terrible price for human evil'. Similarly, the brothel originates all of the corruption of Vienna: it nurtures the promiscuity which leads to Juliet's pregnancy, which commences the complex network of sin and evil throughout the play. The brothel's influence even seeps into the Duke's courtroom- Lucio, a frequent of the 'establishment' constantly interjects his point of view into the Duke's commands (this was emphasised in the 1994 BBC2 David Thacker production by Lucio leaning over to the Duke and Angelo is Act 5, as if he were superior to them). Comparisons can also be made between the rulers of Vienna and the brothel's owner: Mistress Overdone's declarations of self-absorption: 'here's a change in the commonwealth. What shall become of me?' (1.2) mimic Angelo's prioritisation of his own pleasure over the welfare of his subjects. The brothel, like the witches, is a microcosm of the evil in the world of the play that feeds into the decisions of the characters.

Elizabeth Mahoney writes that in Measure, 'the characters are all as bad as each other' and it's true that evil seems to be the prevalent force in

both plays. The abrupt 'comedy' ending of Measure and Malcolm's shadowy intentions as a ruler leave the audience with a sense of uneasiness. Despite the apparent victory of good, it is evil that sticks in our hearts and minds: from Macbeth's 'bleak poetry' to Angelo's perverted desires. And Rupert Goold's production hints that, despite the Macbeth's bloody end in Act 5, their evil alliance retains the ultimate victory: in the last shot we see Macbeth and Lady Macbeth reunited, suggesting that evil still rules in their kingdom. However, in the conclusive shot of David Thacker's Measure, Isabella and the Duke face each other on a chequered floor like the king and queen of a chess game. Will the purity of Isabella prevail over the uncertain character of Duke? At the end of both these plays, Shakespeare forces his audience to accept that good will never definitively triumph over evil: the balance between them is at the heart of our society, both in the 16th century and now.

Moderator's comment:

This is an example of a study that has accessed the highest bands on all four Assessment Objectives. There is a sustained linking of the two plays and the references to other critical readings and to relevant contextual issues are fully integrated into the student's argument.

Creative Critical Response

Write the director's Programme Notes for a new production of Macbeth.

A Director's Decisions: Charles Elliot discusses Macbeth

Making my production relevant

I was very inspired by Rupert Goold's 2010 production, full of 'chilling Stalinist absolutism' as Nicholas de Jongh in the Evening Standard wrote recently. One of Shakespeare's clear intentions when writing Macbeth was rendering it frightening to his audience, as seen in the themes of blood and madness which run throughout the play. Goold set his production in a Soviet war in the 20th century, making use of a Stalin-like figure to portray the tyranny of Macbeth, while keeping the action within the environment of war. Since conflict in battle is seen throughout the play and is also a common fear factor for both 1606 and a modern audience, I decided to adopt this setting of war while adding a more modern twist. I chose to set my play in Scotland with Macbeth as an Islamist general who rises to power by killing the Scottish first Minister. I felt that this take represents very current fears in the UK: both the fear of terrorism and the dilution of Scottish culture through immigration, as well as deeper concerns about religious and racial tension. Making Macbeth and Lady Macbeth Islamic also references a concept frightening for Shakespeare's original audience – the looming of the Ottoman Turks on the horizon of Europe. While my production comments on the uneasy mix of East and West throughout history, it also plays with another idea that Goold's production gave me – the idea that the Macbeths are foreign to the rest of the characters, set apart by their driving ambition and evil deeds. Goold's choice of staging emphasises this in Act 3 Scene 2 when he gives the couple's dressing room and Eastern feel by using red lighting (also enriching the blood motif) and an Oriental set design. For me, creating a

context that was relevant to the audience for my production was crucial. No one puts it better than Goold himself, who said in a recent interview, "I've always seen Shakespeare as illuminated by a socially specific environment to give context to the political themes that run through his plays."

Portrayal of the witches

Shakespeare's contemporaries would have found the witches, with their bubbling potions and 'beards' terrifying because of the acute fear of the supernatural and the unknown in that era. However, this is not the case nowadays and the challenge for me was to replicate that fear for modern audiences. Inspired by the unusual interpretations in both Michael Boyd's 2011 production, which used the ghosts of Macduff's dead children, and Rupert Goold's unexpected and unsettling 'nurse' witches, I eventually decided to make my witches Jihadists. This links to the wider Islamic / Scottish context and again reflects contemporary anxieties. Jihad and its unfamiliarity is seen as a threat to our society, much as the witches represented deep-seated fears for a 17th century audience.

Staging

I was also inspired by the 1976 RSC production where all the action takes place within a chalk circle on the stage – thus evoking the magic/ demonic associations with witchcraft in the play. I decided to centre all my action around an Arabic patterned carpet. The carpet was particularly useful in the banquet scene, because it allowed me to seat all the guests on the floor around it – as in traditional Islamic feasts – with a fire in the middle. Macbeth's lines make it evident that he sees Banquo's ghost in the fire, while the other characters and the audience can only see the fire. Contemporary fears centre around our losing control over our minds and my interpretation of Banquo's ghost – i.e. Macbeth's unseen hallucinations – is, I believe, more effective for a modern audience than the physical portrayal (quite common in early modern productions) of a white-sheeted, chain-dangling spectre.

Moderator's comment:

This is a convincing piece of writing that demonstrates both the student's engagement with a range of critical contexts (as exemplified by different productions and approaches) and a sound understanding of the contexts in which plays are written and received.

Grade Boundaries

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