

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2015

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

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General Overview

This series saw much productive engagement with texts and tasks across the ability range though, as has been the case in previous series, candidates were invariably more successful in tackling the Assessment Objectives on both the Explorative Study and Creative Critical Response if they had been given - or had been helped to devise - tasks which were clearly directed towards these objectives.

Whilst most centres now are very familiar with the need to address the two strands of the heavily weighted AO3, (36/62 marks for the Explorative Study), there is still some tendency to overlook the demands of AO4 for both pieces of coursework even though this too represents a hefty number of marks (24/62) when both assignments are taken into account. Candidates invariably scored more highly on AO4 when their Explorative Study tasks drew attention in the title to "how audiences over time have responded to texts" and their CCR tasks (with a specific publication/broadcast context) reminded candidates to look at how texts have been critically received in different contexts. Centres should remind candidates that, for AO4, context can be cultural, literary (e.g. genre of revenge tragedy; portrayal of the Vice character as legacy of Medieval Morality plays), biographical and philosophical as well as more obviously historical, social and political.

There are still some centres where marks in the top bands of AO3 are routinely awarded even though candidates have not provided the sustained, balanced, comparative analysis of two plays supported by integrated reference to other readers' interpretations of the texts which are required for marks in the top band. Centres are, however, increasingly making good use of different performances of their plays to address this second strand of AO3 and in one excellent centre, where candidates had clearly been urged to read very widely, they made apt reference to Leo Africanus's *A Description of Africa* and Keats's opinion of Kean's *Othello* when discussing how the eponymous protagonist had been portrayed and perceived by different audiences over time. Acknowledgement of other contemporary plays (such as *Titus Andronicus* for *Othello* and *The Jew of Malta* for *The Merchant Of Venice*) also proved useful when establishing context and original audience-reaction to texts.

The most popular topic for the Explorative Study continues to be some variant on the portrayal of women though this worked best if there was some qualifying phrase on the lines of "as products of their age", again to remind candidates to consider how the original (usually Elizabethan/Jacobean) audiences may have responded to the plays. Examples of questions that worked particularly well were: "Do you agree that Shakespeare uses female threats to male honour [within *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Othello*] to interrogate the social norms of Elizabethan and Jacobean societies?" and "To what extent were women presented as a corrupt influence [in *The Taming of the Shrew* and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*] during the Elizabethan and Caroline eras?"

Other Explorative Study tasks which helped to keep candidates focused on context included: "Does Shakespeare suggest in *Henry V* and *Julius Caesar* that political assassination and waging war are morally justifiable and how does a modern Western audience respond to this notion?" and "To what extent do you consider *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* problematic plays for a 2015 audience?" A much less effective question with an unhelpful sociological bias on the latter two plays was "Explore parenting in *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*" while the equally broad "Machiavelli and Jacobean politics in *King Lear* and *The White Devil*" encouraged a descriptive rather than analytical response.

The combination of *Othello* and *The Merchant Of Venice* was a popular (and generally productive) choice and there was also some very good work on *The Merchant Of Venice* and *Much Ado About Nothing* where candidates were asked to look at Shakespeare's presentation of outsiders in the two plays which again invited them to consider whether characters seen as outside mainstream society in the late 16th century would still be thus regarded in 2015. One particularly enterprising candidate argued quite convincingly that Beatrice might come into the "outsider" category since Shakespeare presents her as not conforming to Elizabethan notions of womanhood for much of the play.

Questions which included an evaluative element ("To what extent do you agree [with a particular critic's opinion] in relation to your texts....?") were helpful in offering candidates a "hook" on which to "hang" their argument (for AOs1 and 3) while tasks which reminded them to engage with all aspects of the writers' craft (structure and form as well as language) were more likely to encourage close engagement with the texts for AO2. There were several centres where candidates were very much encouraged to look at language, form and structure with questions on Shakespeare's use of soliloquy in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* or the potentially destructive quality of rhetoric in *Henry V* and *Julius Caesar*. It was pleasing to see these candidates confidently utilising linguistic as well as literary frameworks in their textual analysis.

As has been the case in previous series, it was disappointing when only one ES question was offered which necessarily resulted in duplication of material in the form of textual illustrations, although some candidates managed to minimise this tendency by introducing a wide range of critical reading in their essays. Two secondary texts which were profitably used by a number of candidates this summer were Shapiro's *1599* and an article by Dr Emma Smith in *emag* entitled "Shakespeare's comedies – conservative or transgressive?" which generated a good deal of spirited discussion!

There were the usual reviews of various performances of a studied play for the Creative Critical Response for a variety of intended audiences – fellow AS students being a popular option and *emagazine* or *The English Review* favoured publications. Where candidates were responding to a particular reviewer's appraisal of a performance, it was very helpful to have the original review appended to the folder. Several centres this year chose to review Joss Whedon's more recent *Much Ado*, often comparing it effectively with Branagh's adaptation and the original text. E-mails from directors to

costume/set designers or members of the cast also worked well as did directors focusing on how to stage a particular scene for a sceptical 21st century audience: the appearance of the Ghost in *Hamlet* was a popular choice here. Successful items for radio or television included a three-way discussion between the programme presenter, a film critic and the director of a new film version of *Twelfth Night* that had portrayed Sir Toby as a more ambivalent figure than the source of pure comedy which we assume delighted Elizabethan audiences. A radio programme in which David Nicholls was quizzed about the differences between his Shakespeare Retold version of *Much Ado* and Shakespeare's original play worked well and there were a number of lively interviews with Shakespearean actors from different eras for Radio 4's *Front Row* as well as a particularly entertaining exchange between the *Front Row* presenter and the director of Frantic Assembly's *Othello*.

One moderator commented: 'Two Creative Critical responses which particularly impressed me this year were a highly able candidate's rebuke to Shawn O'Brien's blog berating the ineffective camera-work in Doran's *Hamlet* which managed to argue convincingly the merits of Doran's interpretation of the theme of surveillance for a 21st century and the transcript of a letter (in consistently Elizabethan idiom) from Thomas Kyd to Dr Whitgifte, Archbishop of Canterbury, reporting Marlowe's religious blasphemy in *Dr Faustus* and calling for his immediate arrest for atheism! Such pastiches are often sadly unconvincing but this was pitch perfect'.

Less successful Creative Critical Response tasks included a tabloid article entitled "Bride jilted at the Altar" which paid no attention to *Much Ado About Nothing* as a play to be staged; reviews of *She's the Man* in which candidates focused on the subsequent fall from grace of the actress who at the time of the film's release received rave reviews for her role as Viola, and a deeply flawed game-show entitled "Taming of the Whore" which featured female characters from both *The Taming of the Shrew* and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*.

Whilst some candidates had produced commendably long lists of secondary reading for their Bibliographies, others cited just their studied texts (usually without publication details) and a few omitted to include a bibliography, a specification requirement, at all. Similarly, moderators found that they needed to remind centres of this unit's recommended word allocation (of 2,000 words for the ES and 500 for the CCR) since there were several centres where candidates' folders were rather unbalanced (e.g. 1,386 words for the Explorative Study and 836 for the Creative Critical Response) which prevented them from maximising their performance when the Explorative Study is worth 62 marks and the Creative Critical Response only 18.

Overall, 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

Most centres had undertaken some form of internal standardisation of the marks awarded across the teaching-groups, with the front cover Centre-Assessor box used to document the outcome, but there were still instances where this process had not been carried out with sufficient rigour. Whilst there were a few where technically accurate, well-argued responses to both tasks had been slightly undervalued (particularly the 'lowest-scoring' folders in a centre), there were even more cases where technically variable ('viola is a women'; 'Beatrices sexuality is questionable but does not outrightly cause her problems'), poorly-paragraphed, unfocused responses, with frequently long, 'undigested' quotations from the plays themselves or critics' opinions had been somewhat generously assessed (particularly for AO1). In these cases, moderators have advised centres to look again at the descriptors for the different achievement-bands on the Edexcel assessment criteria.

There is still a tendency to over-reward AO2 where candidates have done little more than quote a section of text with negligible analysis of its effect and, even if language has been productively explored, structure and form are often overlooked.

In terms of teacher annotation of candidates' work, random ticks and intermittent Assessment Objectives identified in the margins are generally most unhelpful as they give the impression that work has been marked and yet there has been very little actual engagement with what the candidate has written. Listing marks for each Assessment Objective at the end of each assignment and providing a brief front-cover over-view is better than merely giving the overall totals for each Assessment Objective in the total-mark box (particularly when the AO1 and 4 marks don't differentiate between the two assignments).

Some centres preface each folder with their own assessment sheet or a copy of the Edexcel Assessment Criteria with space for comment on the candidate's performance in each Assessment Objective which can be helpful to candidates as well as moderators but often the most useful assessment is that which offers some evaluative comment in the margin followed by summative comments explaining how marks have been awarded for each Assessment Objective. It is the case that most recommended mark adjustments occur in centres where there is negligible teacher-comment on the candidates' folders.

Administration Issues

Most centres submitted their samples promptly and efficiently, but a few had the following familiar errors:

- 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.
- A number of centres allowed their candidates to submit work of around 3000 words. This does the candidates no favours as, almost without exception, excessive word length resulted in low marks on AO1.

EXAMPLES OF CANDIDATES' WORK

Exploratory Study

Compare Shakespeare's presentation of leadership in *Julius Caesar* and *Henry V*

EXTRACT:

In *Henry V* Shakespeare explores whether Henry is morally justified in going to war while in *Julius Caesar* he explores whether or not the conspirators could be considered as justified in their killing of Caesar. Henry's claim to the French throne is portrayed by Shakespeare as questionable because the Salic law indicates that the issue is complicated and possibly dubious. He asks the clergy to, "justly and religiously unfold why the law Salic...should or should not bar us in our claim." The use of the adverbs 'justly' and 'religiously' indicates Henry's desire to be seen as justified and honourable in his claims and this is further highlighted when he avoids direct responsibility for the decision to go to war by asking the clergy, "May I with right and conscience make this claim?" Henry's need for justification is similar to the dilemma faced by Cassius in *Julius Caesar* where he needs the support of Brutus to make the actions of the conspirators appear justified and honourable. Peter Thompson (1992) suggests that, "such is the authority of Brutus's name in Rome that he will virtually create the conspiracy by joining it." The suggestion is that not only is there a requirement to have someone respectable like Brutus supporting the conspiracy but also that someone needs to cancel out the negative opinion of Cassius: "Caesar doth bear me hard, but he loves Brutus."

Casca also voices the importance of Brutus to the conspirators' cause – "O he sits high in all the people's hearts" and "...his countenance, like richest alchemy, will change to virtue and to worthiness." Shakespeare's use of the simile "like richest alchemy" demonstrates his understanding of the power of propaganda and of its role in effective leadership...

... Audiences over time would view these leadership dilemmas differently. An Elizabethan audience, exhausted by war and threatened by potential foreign invaders such as the Spanish, would be only too aware of the consequences of war from their own struggling army in Ireland. However, there was clearly a lot of pro-war propaganda in circulation as demonstrated by the

chorus in *Henry V* ("the warlike Henry assume the part of Mars and at his heels leashed in like hounds, should famine, sword and fire..."). Sean McEvoy points out that the play demonstrates the contemporary belief in the divine right of kings, arguing that "the unlikeliness of the victory, with its grossly unequal casualties was seen as evidence of the hand of God at work." Equally, a contemporary audience of *Julius Caesar* would be able to relate to the political plot as there had been a number of attempts on the life of Queen Elizabeth.

However, in contrast, a twenty-first century audience may view both plays more cynically as the costs of war are now far more known to the public due to 24 mass media coverage and also because there is less support for the view that God is on our side. A modern audience might look at the decisions made by the conspirators and Henry and view them with contempt, knowing the potential consequences of their decisions. Interestingly, however, Winston Churchill still saw the patriotic value of *Henry V* and asked Laurence Olivier to fashion a film of it as boosting propaganda for the troops in WWII – demonstrating the value and appeal of Shakespeare's words over time...

... Confidence is a crucial aspect of leadership. Henry is portrayed as being confident in his decision to go to war. This is in contrast to the conspirators in *Julius Caesar*, particularly Brutus, are less confident and the implication for the audience is that the path they are following may not be morally correct. Shakespeare highlight this uncertainty in Brutus in Act 2 Scene 1 where the majority of the scene consists of Brutus deliberating in soliloquy as to what he should do: "How that might change his nature, there's the question."

The soliloquy, by the conventions of Elizabethan drama, was always to be trusted so Brutus's use of the words 'might' and 'may' would indicate his uncertainty clearly to the audience. In the 2012 RSC production of *Julius Caesar* (Greg Doran) the scene is presented with Brutus pacing up and down outside, giving the impression of a very troubled man. Furthermore, the soliloquy is broken up with semi colons, colons and cesura – "Then, lest he may, prevent. And, since the quarrel will bear no colour." Shakespeare ends the speech by breaking the iambic pentameter rhythm to make a dramatic conclusion to Brutus's thoughts – "and kill him in the shell..."

Moderator's Comments:

While AO3 is the most heavily-weighted of the assessment objectives on this unit, it is important that candidates also address the other objectives. In this study there are some good examples of the candidate exploring details of the writer's craft and use of language (AO2) as well as some very interesting engagement with the contexts in which texts are written and received (AO4).

Compare and contrast Shakespeare's presentation of the 'other' in *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*.

EXTRACT:

...Shylock's first appearance does, unlike Othello's, follow a Jew's stereotypical role of the usurer ... however, almost as soon as he appears Shakespeare makes him sympathetic, detailing the injustices that he has suffered as mitigation for any wrong (I, iii. 101-124), and even lending money without interest. Shylock does at this stage specify:

... and (in merry sport)...
...let the forfeit
Be nominated for an equal pound
Of your fair flesh...

However, I agree with Alan Ablewhite who says he "does not believe *at the time* Shylock intends to kill [Antonio]." It is not quite 'merry sport' but it would serve as an assurance of repayment and an exercise of power – as Ablewhite says, "At this time Shylock cannot know that Antonio's ships will fail." The audience never gets to see what Shylock would do if he was left to enforce the bond, however, for by the time this happens his daughter has eloped with a Christian and stolen a large amount of wealth, and Shylock is quite changed. The extent to which Shylock is affected by all this is made obvious, Solanio describing how Shylock wanders the streets crying for his losses (II,viii.13-14). Shylock even directly cites revenge as his reason for exacting the bond (III,i. 46-48).

The important detail, though, is that after this transformation Shylock moves from a "reasonable, if very narrow, honourable man" (Ablewhite) to the classic stage Jew made familiar to Elizabethans: obsessed with material wealth (II,viii.15) and, like Marlowe's Barabbas (*Jew of Malta*), determined to wreak disproportionate vengeance, his lack of mercy, foregrounded further by Portia's 'quality of mercy' speech, originating from his lack of faith in the doctrine of Christian forgiveness. The similarity of this descent into the caricature Jew and Othello's descent to that of the Moor is very clear.

The ultimate question, phrased by F.R. Leavis, about where 'the real Othello' lies can also be applied to Shylock, although the answer seems simpler: the white Christians have been abusing him since before the play's beginning (I,iii.101-124), so the elopement of Jessica is more a final straw; in *Othello* the entire transformation occurs during the course of the play. The links between Shylock's mistreatment and his behaving like a stage Jew are clear – "If you wrong us shall we not revenge?" The picture built is of a desperate man driven to extremes, his bond a final stand from which he will not retreat.

Othello is more complex. Is he portrayed as a savage whose layers (according to Leavis) of "self-approving, self-dramatization" are stripped away by Iago to reveal what Gardner calls "some kind of buried savagery"? Or is it that – as Rowe argues – "Iago ruins Othello", turning him into a wretched creature similar to the racist stereotype? This question seems to

be debated almost directly within the play itself, the contrast between "Othello" and "the Moor", the individual and the type, exemplified by the play's dual titles: *The Tragedy of Othello* and *The Moor of Venice*. While the Christians refer to Othello more frequently as "the Moor" than by his proper name, Othello never refers to himself as a type. It is also noticeable that the Christians use "Othello" more often in the first half of the play.

While Othello does seem proud of his past at the start, when he used it to win Desdemona's love (I,iii.129-170), as he succumbs to Iago and to jealousy, his view of his own race seems to worsen as he connects himself more with it. Ideas of blackness begin to be associated with wickedness and corruption, demonstrated by the self-hating, "... is now begrimed and black / As mine own face." As this happens he disassociates himself from his own name, increasingly referring to himself in the third person ("Where should Othello go?") and culminating in: "That's he that was Othello: here I am." As Iago erodes Othello's confidence in Desdemona's love for him, which made him proud ("For she had eyes, and chose me.") Othello loses that pride and begins to engage with the Christian stereotype of the Moor, acting in accordance with it. He even states that were their love to fail, "The chaos is come again." As the chaos descends and he sees himself as "the Moor", he deems himself unworthy of the name "Othello", associated with the valiant Christian that the audience sees at the start.

Contradictions in the natures of the "others" are also evident in the genres of the plays. *Othello* is a tragedy, making Othello a straightforward subversion of type – giving the barbaric Moor not only sympathy and nobility but also the highest dramatic standing of a tragic hero. The contradiction in Shylock is evident in the conflicted nature of the play's form: it seems to full of what Rowe calls a "bloody designation of cruelty and mischief" to be a comedy, and yet the play ends happily with a marriage, as a comedy. In this way, Shylock is both the stereotypically Jewish comic villain and a sort of tragic hero, brought low by the flaw of his thirst for revenge.

This builds a picture of Shylock and Othello as similar, if distinct. Othello, I would say, is indeed wrecked easily by Iago, not because of his race's natural tendency to jealousy and irrationality, but because of the insecurity caused by being "other." Shylock is more directly "wrecked" by Christian discrimination, his revenge out of proportion because of years of prior abuse. It is of note that there is no real distinction between Shylock's individual and type – unlike Othello, his person and experience are represented as being of most Jews, in the eyes of Shakespeare at least, and he is more consistently considered in the play as only "the Jew." Overall it would seem that Shakespeare makes no claims that his society's stereotypes of the "others" are false, but rather he provides the rationale behind them...

Moderator's Comments:

What is striking about this example is the confidence with which the candidate engages with interpretations of other readers. This study goes beyond simply citing critical views; the candidate clearly identifies a critical debate (e.g. Gardner v Rowe) and then proceeds to use this as a starting

point for her own argument which is well-developed with pertinent use of the texts. This is an example of a top band performance on AO3.

Creative Critical Response

TASK: A review for the Sixth Form Magazine of the RSC's production of Much Ado About Nothing and its reception by the critics in the national press.

The Royal Shakespeare Company's 'Much Ado About Nothing' was, ironically, 'Nothing' special, with the elaborate set lacking a decent cast and, consequently, substance to the glamour. Initially, I'd felt encouraged by the four star review from 'The Times' but later stood outside the Noel Coward Theatre pondering why I bothered to read a newspaper that makes such poor judgements. As it happens, I wasn't the only one irritated – most of the audience exited with looks of thunder even funnier than the performance. Michael Billington suggested that the director, Iqbal Khan, should "shorten the play's absurdly long three-and-a-quarter hour's running time." I think "absurd" is perfectly fitting, especially as the performance started twenty minutes late – foreshadowing the torture to come!

No doubt intended to give an innovative and exciting dimension to Shakespeare's comedy, the modern Indian context actually detracted from the performance, rendering it overly culture-focused, or "frenetic and over-spiced" as Billington puts it. There was no advantage to such a context, apart from the aesthetic splendour which was not enough to carry the production. I definitely felt the loss of the Italian setting and the English cast and context which normally make the play so engaging.

The visually stunning set, with its beautifully carved balconies and brightly lit plaza in which a giant tree added romantic interest, was one of the few pleasant surprises of the production. Some critics also appreciated the live music – "catchy", "stunning", "buoyant, were some of the accolades" – and it certainly kept the audience awake in ways the actors couldn't. Some performances undermined even that, with Amara Khan, in particular, becoming a key source of frustration. Her smiling facial expression throughout the denunciation scene where Hero is publically humiliated was undeniably infuriating. How Henry Hitchings can state that "she has a lovely innocence as Hero," is beyond me. If he is suggesting that Hero has no comprehension of the humiliation, then it is something of an understatement. Karan's performance was like a return to the 1950's. Do not be fooled. The words 'West End' and 'RSC' can trick anyone into believing a production is of a high standard, but Karan will ensure that the blindfold is removed – bad luck!

Some reprieve comes with the presentations of Beatrice and Benedick by Meera Syal and Paul Bhattacharjee, with their comedy and quick wit. Most of the critics have agreed that they are a "witty central pair" who have an "undeniable charm." A particularly effective scene involved Benedick on his swing flirting with an obviously stunned Beatrice whose surprise at his change of mood is very funny – just as Shakespeare intended it to be, of course.

Nevertheless, you need to let common sense prevail and don't consider going to see this production just for the set, Syal and Bhattacharjee. Trust me – the hype surrounding the RSC's production really is 'Much Ado About Nothing.'

Moderator's Comments:

The task gives the candidate a clear indication of the context and purpose of the writing (peer audience / review) allowing him to demonstrate competency in handling appropriate forms and registers (AO1). The candidate has also been able to show engagement with critical contexts (AO4) by responding to the arguments of other critics (e.g. Billington and Hitchings) rather than simply offering personal opinions. Tasks that encourage this sort of critical engagement are helpful to candidates in accessing the assessment objectives.

Grade Boundaries

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