

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2013

GCE English Literature (6ET02/01)
Explorations in Drama

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General overview

For most centres, this unit is now well-embedded and moderators continue to be impressed by the work of students and their teachers around drama texts. Successful submissions this session included well-documented sample folders, with bibliographies in place and clear evidence that internal moderation had been carried out. The moderators were able to see from the marginal annotation, summative comments in relation to the key Assessment Objectives for both the Explorative Study and the Creative Critical Response, and front-cover overview, how marks had been awarded.

Some submissions, however, had several errors in administration:

- The top and bottom students were missing from the sample. Centres should be aware that these students' 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, Rotherham address; the yellow copy goes to the moderator.
- All additions should be checked before the sample leaves the centre – in some cases students had been awarded a significant number of marks fewer than were written on their work.
- Some students 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 student's folder.
- A number of centres allowed their students to submit work of around 3000 words. This does the students no favours as, almost without exception, excessive word length resulted in low marks on AO1.

Annotation and moderation

Most centres annotate their students' work in a way that is helpful to the external moderator and show clear evidence of robust internal moderation. However:

- Centres are reminded that they should base all their marks on bands and not grades. It is not helpful to put grades on students' work.
- In order to fulfil the specification requirements for internal moderation, there must be separate totals for each coursework piece so that the moderator can see clearly how the overall mark was awarded.
- Centres clearly felt that they needed to indicate particular AOs in the body of the essays: this doubtless was helpful to centres in this first series of a new specification. However, it is important that centres in their summative comments do not simply reproduce the words of the assessment grids but rather comment on the student's individual work. This gives the moderator a far clearer understanding of why particular marks have been awarded.
- Comments that are addressed solely to the student are not helpful to moderators – 'This is much better than your usual effort' –and so on.
- Almost all centres had engaged fully with the process of internal moderation and it was good to see evidence of an ongoing dialogue between teachers and the centre-assessor. Centre moderation

comments are really helpful – eg ‘I think you’re being too cautious on AO2’ etc. demonstrates clearly to the moderator what processes of internal moderation have taken place. Just crossing out and changing marks is not helpful.

Students’ Performance

Some folders seemed rather short and future students are advised to take account of Edexcel’s recommendation that out of the 2,500 words for this unit, 2,000 should be allocated to the Explorative Study (worth 62/80 marks) and 500 to the Creative Critical Response (worth 18/80 marks).

Task–setting for both pieces in the folder continues to have an important bearing on a student’s success. The title, ‘The representation of the tragic hero in *Hamlet* and *Othello*’ does not focus tightly enough on AO3: a better approach would be, ‘**In his essay, Phillip Edwards discusses the breakdown in sympathy for Hamlet during the twentieth century. Do you agree that this is the case and does it also apply to Othello?**’ The latter gives the student both a clear invitation to compare texts and a critical interpretation to explore.

As has been mentioned in previous Moderators’ Reports, some students under-perform on some key assessment objectives in this unit. In the Explorative Study AO3 is most heavily weighted, offering 45% of the total marks. There are two parts to the objective: students have to ‘explore connections and comparisons between different literary texts’ and their work has to be ‘informed by interpretations of other readers’. It is therefore important that students are well-prepared to make sustained, interesting links between texts and also that they are exposed to a range of other readers’ interpretations (e.g. critical essays, film versions etc.) so that they can make explicit reference to, and engage with, these in their essays. Moderators’ comments from this series were:

This is the dominant assessment objective so it was surprising to see that some centres did not pay attention to both aspects of it, awarding top band marks to essays where the plays were treated almost separately, or where there was no reference to other readers. Occasionally, the amount of time devoted to one of the plays was so limited that it was impossible for comparisons to be sustained: one student wrote about 8 lines on the second text. Students used performances as interpretations with some success. Generally it is quite difficult for students to integrate critical views into their own writing and engage with them, and build on them to work out their own interpretation. It is better to have a range of critical reading, covering different approaches than to be reliant on any one critic. But there were some inappropriate choices – Amazon Good Reads, York Notes, lots of ‘Pass Your Exams’ web sites.

Another area where some students could improve performance is in choosing appropriate tasks for the Creative Critical Response. Often there is no clear indication given of what the “creative” element of the task was. Students tend to write their own reviews of parts of a production, but the context is never clear – neither audience nor situation is clarified - and it is

therefore hard to award marks for the student's awareness of register and audience and for writing using an appropriate style and structure (AO1). Sometimes the CCR pieces read like short literary essays. Similarly, there seems to be little acknowledgment of the demands of AO4. Students can make perceptive comments about texts but there is often limited interpretation of texts 'within their contexts,' nor a clear awareness of how they are received by audiences.

The point has been made in previous Moderators' Reports, that centres need to set tasks that are explicit in their demands for register and form and they need to give students a critical 'hook' on which to base their piece. A straight review of a play or video does not meet these requirements.

However, there were also many excellent tasks set for the Creative Critical Response. Some effective ones included:

- Imagine you are an actress playing the part of Viola in *Twelfth Night*. Focussing on one scene, write your rehearsal diary for the day.
- Radio 4 is doing a series of interviews with actors entitled: Fathers and Daughters. Imagine you're an actor discussing the differences in playing Vermandero from *The Changeling* and Egeus from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
- Produce an extract from a weekly TV Preview column for a local newspaper, introducing *Macbeth*, from the BBC *Shakespeare Re-told* series.
- Two university lecturers are debating the relative merits of Olivier's Hamlet with the version played by Mel Gibson. Script an extract from their conversation.
- Your school is running an Arts Festival which will include some short drama performances. Write a letter to the Deputy Head, convincing him that your form be allowed to perform one chosen scene from *Othello*, explaining why it would be an effective addition to the festival.

Examples of students' work

Explorative Study

Compare Marlowe's presentation of magic in Dr Faustus with that of Shakespeare in The Tempest.

...Prospero's final act of magic is benevolent as he frees his spirit servant Ariel. In contrast to this, Faustus's last magic deed is self-gratifying and sinful as he has a sexual relationship with a devil in Helen of Troy's shape. Faustus exclaims how Helen, "launched a thousand ships / and burnt the topless towers of Ilium." The theme of soaring and falling in the play is taken up in the launching of ships and the burning of towers, mirroring how Helen both inspires and destroys Faustus. Levin remarks that "the topless towers are recurring symbols [in Marlowe's plays] for illimitable aspiration,"

stressing Faustus's Renaissance characteristics. Helen represents the ancient world glorified by Renaissance scholars like Faustus, but as Greg argues, there is "irony in the thought that Helen's kiss could make Faustus 'immortal' and a chilling literalness in the fact that her lips 'suck forth' his soul never to be returned." This final act of magic demonstrates to the audience how Faustus has become a slave to his own lusts, as shown in his rhapsody to Helen about which Gill remarks that while " the delighted verse surges forward to praise what is lovely and enduring, an undertow drags back to remind us that this beauty brought destruction."

Very different to the lascivious Faustus is Prospero who believes chastity to be very important and fiercely warns Ferdinand of the punishment if he "breaks [Miranda's] virgin-knot" before they have been married with "full and holy rite." Prospero clearly believes in the sanctity of marriage and as Hebron points out, he "blesses their union in a spiritual masque." This masque ...parallels the presentation of the Seven Deadly Sins in Doctor Faustus. The Sins, characterising the vices of mankind, are shown to Faustus by Lucifer in a large spectacle to distract him from his internal conflicts. Faustus is blind to his own sin, pride, and ironically cries "O this feeds my soul!" when they actually embody the fate awaiting him...

...Prospero emerges as a man who can overcome magic, while Faustus is himself overcome by it. This is highlighted by the paralleling of Faustus's line, "I'll burn my books." With Prospero's "I'll drown my books." The destruction of books was a conventional way to abjure magic but for Faustus it is too late. The line is placed powerfully immediately before he is dragged to hell...

*In contrast, Prospero's decision is not forced; it is his decision to destroy his books because he knows the destructive power of magic and is concerned that he has interfered with the natural world: "Graves at my command / Have waked their sleepers." This speech is based on the incantation of the witch, Medea, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* – the best classical source for myths which would have been appreciated by Renaissance scholars. Magic has much more control over Faustus than Prospero because of his unholy alliance with Lucifer...*

Moderator's Comment:

Notice how this student sustains close comparisons between the two plays and, at the same time, fully engages with the critical observations of Roma Gill. The student, by linking the texts intelligently and by engaging with interpretations from other readers, fulfils all the criteria for a high band mark on AO3.

Explorative Study

To what extent does Shakespeare insinuate that a 'new order' brings about disorder and cruelty? Compare Macbeth and King Lear.

In both Macbeth and King Lear, the standard Jacobean status quo is questioned and challenged by a 'new order' in which authority is derived from motivation and power, as opposed to age or birth

status. Although it is true – as Greenblatt states – that Shakespeare’s society “was intensively, pervasively, visibly hierarchical,” it is also true that the playwright is recognized for questioning (or at least appearing to, in order to teach a lesson) the social conventions of his day. Due to the chaos and brutality that is brought about by subverting the old, feudalistic order in Macbeth and King Lear, it seems clear that Shakespeare means to warn his audience against challenging what Jacobean would have considered the ‘natural’ order.

Vital to the stability of the Jacobean status quo were the concepts of loyalty and bonds. Under the new order, bonds are broken and loyalty is superseded by greed and lust for power. Bonds to family, kings and those in higher power were meant to be strong and deep rooted in love and loyalty. Cordelia gives a modern audience some sense of the power and affection of such a bond when the greatest love she can give to her father is, “I love your majesty / According to my bond, no more nor less.” Although in modern times, this may seem distant and cold – particularly in the light of her sisters’ exaggerated claims of love – Cordelia’s honesty and earnestness allows us to see the great love behind the comment’s simplicity. The audience should be able to infer what this comment should mean to Lear and recognize its importance.

Likewise, Macbeth is bonded to Duncan, as both his subject and his host. Even with his evil intentions and “vaulting ambition,” Macbeth demonstrates the strength of these bonds by hesitating and considering before breaking them recklessly. He truly questions murdering Duncan, almost solely because he would be breaking his bond to someone staying at his house, as he put it: “in double trust.” Ultimately, of course, Macbeth breaks the bonds in pursuit of power, but it is clearly a difficult decision for him to so forcibly defy the pervasive social hierarchy, as his soliloquies demonstrate. It is this betrayal that is a characteristic of a new order where those in powerful positions have not come by them in the traditional way...

... Shakespeare also portrays this destruction and chaos by exploring the idea of nature. Edmund, who embodies the ideals of the new order, scoffs at nature, just as he disdains the social structure that makes him, a bastard, lesser than his brother. His scorn for nature is developed in his monologues where he mocks those who hold nature responsible for their fate, “as if [they] were villains by necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves and treachers by spherical predominance”. He sees humans as independent of any universal order or chain of command.

However, it is apparent that the kingdoms in Macbeth and King Lear serve as microcosms for the universe. While both are in chaos due to the rise of a new order, the universe itself seems to lose control. As soon as Lear is betrayed by his daughters, nature seems to react. The storm in King Lear reflects on stage the tempestuousness of the ‘new order’ kingdom. Similarly, the night on which Macbeth murders

Duncan sees nature fall into chaos. Shakespeare chooses to use disturbing imagery to demonstrate this, as Duncan's horses "turned wild in nature" and ate each other and the human subversion of power is mirrored by the animal kingdom: "a falcon, tow'ring in her pride of place, was by a mousing owl, hawked at and killed." Clearly Shakespeare wants to suggest that upsets to the social structure do not just affect those closely involved in the situation. As Greenblatt puts it, "Shakespeare's world constantly told itself that authority naturally inhered in the elderly. At stake, they said, was not simply a convenient social arrangement...but rather the moral structure of the universe, the sanctified immemorial order of things." Tennehouse concurs: "King Lear shows us ...the dangers of not following the 'old ways' of patriarchal hierarchy." Shakespeare understood that his audience would be frightened, not only by the new order itself, but also by the ramifications of challenging a structure that had been in place for centuries. By giving examples, in Macbeth and King Lear, of what, and how far-reaching, these consequences might be, he is perhaps warning his audience against threatening to break with the accepted hierarchy...

Moderator's Comment:

This extract illustrates a high performance on all four Assessment Objectives. There is a vigorous and sustained argument (helped by a clearly focussed task) and an appropriate use of literary terms which meet AO1 requirements. The discussion of Shakespeare's use of imagery addresses the criteria for AO2. Again, the explicit invitation to compare in the task itself helps the student focus on AO3, as does the full engagement with a range of critical views. Regarding AO4, the student shows a wide-ranging understanding of the contexts in which the texts were produced and are received, but notice how all discussion of context is consistently linked with the texts themselves and not simply introduced in an abstract way.

Creative Critical Response

Two teachers - Mrs Berwick and Dr Bothwell (a conservative teacher with a great respect for 'the classics') are in the midst of discussing the Macbeth episode of the BBC's Shakespeare Re-told series (written by Peter Moffat and directed by Mark Brozel) and the extent to which it could benefit their A Level classes. In this extract they are discussing whether the binmen in the new production accomplish what Shakespeare intended for his 'weird sisters'...

Mrs Berwick: ...In the modern context, the 'witches' as binmen become applicable, realistic. Our students would be dubious about witchcraft and magic. However, it's quite believable that a binman's power could derive from knowledge acquired by going through other people's rubbish. Also, just as witches were considered outcasts in Jacobean society, refuse collectors are seen as outsiders nowadays because of their association with waste and stuff that's discarded.

Dr Bothwell: Yes, their method of obtaining knowledge is credible, but binmen could not inspire the same fear in our students that

Shakespeare's witches inspired during the Jacobean era. Throughout King James's reign, the persecution of 'witches' was overwhelming. Even their simple and stereotypical chants, such as "fire burn, and cauldron bubble" would have terrified Shakespeare's audience. How could a binman possibly inspire the same widespread fears?

Mrs Berwick: *Well, although it's not quite the same, the current anxieties over identity theft have created widespread paranoia. Ultimately that's what our students will find frightening about the binmen and their apparent 'all-knowing' powers. In a society that values privacy, teenagers are raised to be wary of anyone who removes their sense of security. The modern 'witches' might not tap into a universal anxiety, as in Shakespeare's day, but Mark Brozel consciously echoes the paranoia felt by King James and his contemporaries by associating the 'witches' with our current fears.*

Dr Bothwell: *Some students might be scared by the binmen, but others will laugh at them and their lack of menace. Some of their scenes – such as when they begin to sing "And their sons..." - while driving away from Joe and Billy – are downright frivolous and students won't take them seriously. Also, I think Bronzel's decision to change their gender somehow makes them less ominous.*

Mrs Berwick: *Okay, but you must admit that the adaptation is quite faithful to the original? There is meticulous attention to the detail of settings, for instance: the heath's replaced with a landfill site, with the storm brewing in the background – all this is as foreboding as Shakespeare's imagery of the 'blasted heath.' And the binmen only ever appear late at night or very early in the morning, equating it with the 'witching hour' of the weird sisters. Also, the darkness of the alleyways reflects the imagery Shakespeare uses when the sisters meet. In fact, I'm not sure how important their gender is to their function in the play. Although they're referred to as 'sisters' their sex seems ambiguous. Banquo even points this out in the original when he says, "Your beards forbid me to interpret." And, actually, this blurred line between male and female contributes to their obscurity and mystery – important characteristics.*

Dr Bothwell: *I have to disagree. It's vital that the witches are female so that there is a direct correlation between them and Lady Macbeth. As females, the witches along with Lay Macbeth link the supernatural with women, manifesting the negative attitudes towards women that were common in that era. The witches also help represent the power that females hold over Macbeth – tempting him and influencing him. It's as if Macbeth is somehow emasculated by all the women he has contact with. For instance, Lady Macbeth...*

Moderator's Comment:

This is a high-scoring response. Note how the context for the piece is made explicit in the beginning. This gives the student (and the moderator) a clear indication as to the register and purpose of the piece. Note also that the student has produced just an extract of a conversation: this is a good idea

as it keeps the word count down and allows a specific focus on just a few key critical areas. The student writes accurately in a convincing register, with a lively sense of debate (AO1). There is a clear awareness of contemporary audiences and contexts for both versions and an engagement with detail from both texts (AO4).

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwant to/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

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