

Candidate Style Answers

OCR GCSE English Literature

Unit A661 Literary Heritage Linked Texts

This Support Material booklet is designed to accompany the OCR GCSE English Literature specification for teaching from September 2010.

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Introduction

OCR has produced these candidate style answers to support teachers in interpreting the assessment criteria for the new GCSE specifications and to bridge the gap between new specification release and availability of exemplar candidate work.

This content has been produced by subject experts, with the input of Chairs of Examiners, to illustrate how the sample assessment questions might be answered and provide some commentary on what factors contribute to an overall grading. The candidate style answers are not written in a way that is intended to replicate student work but to demonstrate what a “good” or “excellent” response might include, supported by examiner commentary and conclusions.

As these responses have not been through full moderation and do not replicate student work, they have not been graded and are instead, banded “middle” or “high” to give an indication of the level of each response.

Please note that this resource is provided for advice and guidance only and does not in any way constitute an indication of grade boundaries or endorsed answers.

Unit A661 Literary Heritage Linked Texts

Shakespeare and Film/Audio/Performance

Question

Remind yourself of Act 1 Scene 3 and the opening of Act 2 Scene 1 (lines 1-30) in one or two film versions or listen to one or two audio versions.

By referring closely to Shakespeare's text, explore how the characters of Macbeth and Banquo are portrayed in the film version(s) you have watched or the audio versions you have listened to.

You should consider:

- the thoughts and feeling that Macbeth and Banquo express
- the way the other characters react to them
- the dramatic effect of the scene.

Candidate A

Answer, using the RSC film version, starring Ian McKellen and Judi Dench

In Act 1 Scene 3 the three Witches meet Macbeth and Banquo, who are on their way back from battles with Macdonwald and the King of Norway, supported by the Thane of Cawdor. They greet Macbeth with the titles of Thane of Glamis and Thane of Cawdor, and promise him that he shall “be King hereafter”. When Banquo asks them what his future will be, they tell him he will be “Lesser than Macbeth, and greater”, “Not so happy, yet much happier” and “Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none.” In Act 2 Scene 1 Shakespeare shows us how Macbeth and Banquo have reacted to what the witches have told them.

The film version made Act 1 Scene 3 very dark. Macbeth’s first line is “So foul and fair a day I have not seen”. This is interesting as the witches said at the end of Act 1 Scene 1 “Fair is foul and foul is fair”, so Shakespeare is making some link between the witches and Macbeth. When Banquo sees the witches he says how unnatural they look. They are “So withered and so wan in their attire” and they have beards. This film version made them look scary, but did not portray them as having beards. The way they look gives us no reason to think that Macbeth and Banquo should trust them. When Banquo and Macbeth see them, they draw their swords as if they can see danger. In the film version, Banquo puts his sword back in its sheath before Macbeth, showing that he is not such a violent man as Macbeth.

When the witches have told Macbeth his future, he is very surprised and is at first unable to speak. In this version he very clearly “starts” and Banquo says he is afraid and seems “to fear things that do sound most fair”. I think this is because he has ambitions to be king and the witches have read his mind.

When Macbeth is able to speak he demands that the witches tell him more. He is already Thane of Glamis, so the witches have told him something he already knows. He thinks the Thane of Cawdor is alive and “to be King/Stands not within the prospect of belief”. But the witches vanish without telling him any more. Banquo and Macbeth are talking about what the witches have told them when Ross and Angus enter. Ross calls Macbeth “Thane of Cawdor” as we saw Duncan promise him this title when he ordered the other Thane of Cawdor’s execution in Act 1 Scene 2. In the film version, Macbeth’s first reaction to hearing the news was shock. Then he turned his head away from Banquo, Ross and Angus, and spoke his thoughts directly to the camera and me as part of the audience. His thoughts showed that being Thane of Cawdor was not enough for him. “The greatest is behind.” When he turned back to the others, his face did not show what he had been thinking. Instead he smiled and thanked Ross and Angus for bringing the news.

The news that he is Thane of Cawdor makes him start believing in what the witches told him. Perhaps being King is now “within the prospect of belief”. He shows that he is starting to believe them when he asks Banquo, “Do you not hope your children shall be kings?” Banquo’s answer may show that he is suspicious of what Macbeth might be thinking. “That trusted home,/might yet enkindle you unto the crown,/Besides the Thane of Cawdor.”

Macbeth has a lengthy aside, which again he says directly to the camera. This shows what he is thinking. When he says, “Two truths are told, as happy prologues” he is saying that he will be king, because a prologue is always followed by the important part of a play. In the film, the actor, Ian McKellen, brought out the way Macbeth is arguing with himself. He is obviously puzzled, feeling that what the witches told him “Cannot be ill” because he is now both Thane of Glamis and Thane of Cawdor. He also says it “cannot be good”. This, I think, is because, if he is going to be king, something must happen to the present king, Duncan. In this aside he mentions “murder” as a way of becoming king, and Ian McKellen showed how horrified Macbeth was at the thought of killing the king. It is not something he has done. It is “fantastical, “which means it is at the moment a fantasy,

something in his imagination. He is lost in his thoughts. He does not notice when Banquo says "Look, how our partner's rapt." His argument with himself ends when he says, "If Chance will have me King, why, Chance may crown me, / Without my stir." He thinks that he may become king without having to do anything, like "murder" about it. When Banquo reminds him that they must go, Macbeth again turned back to the group with a big smile, hiding the agony he had just shown to the camera. He is showing that he has two faces and is a hypocrite,

In Act 2 Scene 1 we see what the prophecies of the witches have done to Macbeth and Banquo. Macbeth is on his way to kill Duncan after Lady Macbeth has persuaded him. Again the scene is very dark. In the film it also looked foggy, perhaps showing Macbeth's doubts about what he is going to do. Banquo cannot sleep. He says "merciful powers! / Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature Gives way to in repose." In the film he says this as a prayer. I think the thoughts that come to him when he is asleep are also about killing Duncan so his sons can be kings.

Shakespeare has made Banquo and Macbeth very different though. Banquo wants to keep his "allegiance clear" and Macbeth is about to kill, showing no "allegiance" to Duncan.

Commentary

This reasonably organised response selects relevant material from the prescribed scenes and uses Shakespeare's text and the film to demonstrate understanding of some aspects of Macbeth and Banquo. There is evidence of linking Shakespeare's text to the realization of that text on screen. A sound mid-range response.

Candidate B

Answer

In these two scenes, Shakespeare has made Macbeth and Banquo contrasting characters. They both receive prophecies concerning their futures from the three witches; Macbeth allows his mind to become poisoned by them, whereas Banquo, though troubled by them, keeps his “allegiance clear”.

Returning from battle (Macbeth in the film still has blood on his face), Macbeth is “All-hail’d” by the witches as Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor and “King hereafter”. The first difference between the generals is shown by their reactions to these prophecies. Macbeth is startled (McKellen’s reaction was startled silence) while Woodvine’s Banquo notes that he seems “to fear/Things that do sound so fair”. Banquo boldly challenges the witches to tell what “the seeds of time” hold for him and is told that he will be “Lesser than Macbeth, and greater, “Not so happy, yet much happier” and that he shall “get kings” although he will not be one himself. When they vanish, to the frustration of Macbeth who wants to know more, Ross and Angus arrive and inform Macbeth that Duncan has given him the title of Thane of Cawdor.

The news seems to confirm that the witches “can look into the seeds of time” and prophesy what awaits the generals. McKellen’s Macbeth delivered his aside directly to the camera, a technique used elsewhere in the film for allowing the viewer to see into Macbeth’s mind, and almost become his accomplice; the aside reveals Macbeth’s hopes and ambitions: “Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor:/The greatest is behind”.

When he asks Banquo whether this has raised his hopes that “your children shall be kings”, he receives a clear warning from Banquo of the dangerous path he faces if he trusts the instruments of Darkness:

“ ... oftentimes, to win us to our harm,

The instruments of Darkness tell us truths:

Win us with honest trifles, to betray’s

In deepest consequence.”

Macbeth ignores this warning and only after he has murdered Duncan does he realise that he has given his soul “mine eternal jewel” to the Devil, the common Enemy of man”. McKellen’s Macbeth turns away from Banquo and his warning, to deliver another aside to the camera. For him the “honest trifles” are “happy prologues” to a greater event (which must mean kingship). We see McKellen conveying Macbeth’s puzzlement as he attempts to unravel the riddle he faces. “This supernatural soliciting” he reasons, “cannot be ill” (it has already brought him the title of Thane of Cawdor); but it “cannot be good” either, since it has presented him with a “horrid image” that unfixes his hair. McKellen’s horror at the thought of Duncan’s “murther”, which he senses may be the way by which he will become king, was very powerful. Macbeth is in a world of his own, “rapt” and apparently unaware of the others. He concludes, “If Chance will have me King, why, Chance may crown me,/Without my stir.” If Chance does crown him, there will be no need for “murther”. “Time and the hour runs through the roughest day”, suggesting again that he will simply let things take their course. When he turns back to the group, McKellen smiles as if he never had the idea of “murther” in his mind. This is the Macbeth, who at one point in the scene, had his arm around

Banquo's shoulder, a trusty and apparently good-natured soldier. However, in this RSC version, Banquo watches Macbeth's back as if what he has heard, and Macbeth's reactions, have aroused his suspicions.

At the beginning of Act 2, it is clear that Banquo too has been affected by the witches' prophecies. It is after twelve and the night is very dark: "There's husbandry in heaven;/Their candles are all out". The RSC film includes mists swirling about and we remember that Macbeth called for darkness in Act 1 Scene 4, linking darkness with evil: "Stars, hide your fires! Let not light see my black and deep desires."

Yet Banquo and Fleance are not yet a-bed, as Macbeth says the King is. Banquo is exhausted, as he says "A heavy summons lies like lead upon me" but "yet I would not sleep". He is avoiding sleep as he, like Macbeth later in the play, is troubled in his sleep. This Banquo crosses himself before praying to "merciful Powers" asking them to "Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature/Gives way to in repose". The "cursed thoughts" must be similar to "that horrid image" that unfixed Macbeth's hair in Act 1 Scene 3 and was associated with "murder". The difference between the two men is that Banquo will not act on these thoughts to put his sons on the throne of Scotland, whereas Macbeth in this scene is on his way to murder Duncan. Banquo's thoughts are "cursed" and linked to the words of the witches; he tells Macbeth, "I dreamt last night of the Weird Sisters". Macbeth is surely lying when he says, "I think not of them"; he, in fact, sent the letter Lady Macbeth reads in Act 1 Scene 5 to tell her about their prophecies. At this stage in the play, it seems possible that Macbeth could be considering making Banquo an accomplice, offering at some point to have "words upon that business" and "It shall make honour for you". If gaining Banquo's co-operation was his intention, it is dashed when Banquo replies "So I lose none/In seeking to augment it ... I shall be counselled".

Shakespeare has made Macbeth and Banquo similar in some ways. They are great generals and both hear prophecies that tempt them to betray their King. However, Macbeth is tempted and found wanting, but then, unlike Banquo, he has a wife. Banquo is tempted but keeps "My bosom franchis'd, and allegiance clear".

Commentary

Sensitive critical engagement with the text is demonstrated in this cogent and well supported response. Links are confidently made with the film and other parts of the play. Knowledge and understanding are everywhere apparent. A top higher response.