

Candidate 11

The evidence for this candidate has achieved the following marks for this course assessment component.

The candidate was awarded **20 marks**.

Q24 *“There have to be moments when you glimpse something decent, something life-affirming even in the most unappealing character.” Discuss with reference to **two** plays.*

Knowledge and Understanding

This essay demonstrates comprehensive knowledge and understanding of both plays. It is a full and relevant exploration, which often shows consideration of the implications of the question, ie how the central characters (Leontes and Prospero) are shown to be unappealing, how they are perceived by the audience at varying points in the plays, and when and how they change (Leontes from a ‘morbidly jealous tyrant ... reborn and through his penitence restored’, and Prospero ‘undergoing a radical transformation from vengeful magus to forgiving human’) and come to be regarded as ‘decent’. The candidate links this to the idea of the tragicomedy, and the dual nature of the human condition. There is extensive use of textual evidence from throughout both plays, which is clearly focused on the demands of the question. This essay’s strength is its ability to consider the ‘big picture’, eg ‘One play stretches time, the other squeezes it. One shifts setting, the other stays still. But at the same time ... both are centrally concerned with change ... death and loss, power and time. Both are led by protagonists who, though at first appearing monstrous to the audience are transformed into decent, life-affirming characters.’

Analysis

The candidate charts the progress of the main characters: ‘evil and neglectful though these men may be, time heals all’. The candidate begins with Leontes and analyses his transformation into a jealous husband ‘over the course of a single speech’. There is reference here to staging also: the various ways in which directors have sought to overcome the lack of ‘obvious cue in the text’. The candidate returns to this idea later in the essay. The essay follows Leontes, who, ‘by the turning point in Act III scene iii’ is ‘entirely unsympathetic’. Prospero is then analysed comparatively in his ‘neglect and abuse of power’ and his subsequent subjugation of both Caliban and Ariel (although, as the candidate points out, he is ‘slightly kinder to Ariel’). The candidate has chosen to focus on this, rather than the relationship between father and daughter – the candidate does not comment on this at all, even though there are instances where we could catch glimpses of Prospero being ‘decent’. There is a reference to a source for ‘The Tempest’ (an essay by Montaigne), which the candidate attempts to integrate into the argument; however the idea of what is essentially narrative perspective is not explored further. The link to analysing the change in Leontes is beautifully realised: ‘But while Prospero learns that he must forgive, Leontes learns he must be forgiven.’

The candidate is particularly successful in creating an overview of themes and linking the plot and our perceptions of the characters through it to the genre of tragicomedy: 'It is these glimpses of humanity in seemingly evil characters that make the genre ring true.'

Evaluation

Evaluation permeates this essay, and is occasionally embedded, other times explicit: 'In a sense, the 'tyrant' is so overcome by his morbid jealousy that the audience may begin to feel a pang of sympathy for him, but it is only fleeting.' There is always a sense of a committed, clear evaluative stance with respect to the texts and the question. This is skilfully based on precise evidence.

Expression

Minimum competence is clearly achieved.

This essay can be placed in the 20-19 band range and since it fully meets the standard described in this range, it is awarded a mark of 20.

Mark: 20