

General Vision and Viewpoint Comparative Study Q (b) 40-Mark Sample

Macbeth and *A Doll's House*

At Leaving Cert English (Higher), candidates must answer on Shakespearean Drama. The Shakespearean play can be studied on its own for SECTION I – The Single Text or as an element in SECTION II, The Comparative Study.

The Higher Level Comparative Modes for Examination in 2023 are:

- i. General Vision and Viewpoint
- ii. Literary Genre
- iii. Theme or Issue

Exam Focus

In Part (b) 40-mark Comparative Study questions, you are required to:

- ◆ respond to the question, comparing your two chosen texts
- ◆ discuss the particular aspect/s of the mode you have chosen
- ◆ explain the impact these aspect/s have on the reader or audience

Selected Texts

Macbeth (William Shakespeare)

A Doll's House (Henrik Ibsen)

- ◆ The following Part (b) 40-mark sample answer uses *Macbeth* as one of the two prescribed texts for comparison.
- ◆ The candidate would not have chosen *Macbeth* for either the Single Text section or for the Part (a) 30-mark Comparative Study question.

Exam Focus

In the Comparative Study two-part question:

Part (a) requires discussion of **one** prescribed text (30 marks)

- ◆ (Aim for around 400 words over 30 minutes)

Part (b) requires comparison of **two** other prescribed texts (40 marks)

- ◆ (Aim for around 600 words over 40 minutes)

Sample Question

General Vision and Viewpoint

'Evidence of injustice or prejudice can influence our sense of the general vision and viewpoint in a text.'

- (b) Compare the extent to which your sense of the vision and viewpoint was shaped by evidence of injustice or prejudice in **two other texts** on your comparative course. Develop your response with reference to your chosen texts. (40)

Sample Answer

1. My sense of the dark vision of 'A Doll's House' by Henrik Ibsen was formed by clear evidence of prejudice against women in the unequal relationship between Nora and Helmer Torvald in the opening scenes of the play. Despite the lack of evidence of misogyny in Shakespeare's play, 'Macbeth', I still found the vision pessimistic. In each text endearments, dependence and control all play a part in creating the dark outlook.
2. Helmer uses animal terms 'Little squirrel' and 'spendthrift bird' to his wife, Nora. While this shows affection, it deprives Nora of her independence by creating a false, impractical view of life. Nora is to be indulged as a 'mere baby' who should not concern herself about 'such matters' as borrowing. Nora is treated like a make-believe doll rather than an independent woman. Helmer is stifling Nora's ability to develop into an independent human being by treating her as a pet to be looked after. She is forbidden to eat macaroons in order to save her teeth. She is indulged, 'The child shall have her own way'. This unequal, old-fashioned relationship creates an ominous viewpoint at the start of the play.
3. In contrast, Shakespeare creates a level relationship between husband and wife in 'Macbeth'. Lady Macbeth is 'my dearest partner in greatness'. Rather than shielding his wife from harsh reality, like Torvald, Macbeth wishes to share all that has happened to him. He relates his meeting with the witches so that his wife might not 'lose the dues of rejoicing by being ignorant of what greatness' is to come. Husband and wife express their love for each other in very different types of adult endearments ('Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor' and 'My dearest love') than those childish ones used by the Torvalds. Yet despite this evidence that the Macbeths' relationship contains no misogyny, the outlook is dark because their common goal is evil regicide. The Torvalds, ironically, both had a good goal, to create a secure home, but their relationship is imbalanced, darkening the play's viewpoint.
4. Lady Macbeth soon assumes control, but the effect is chilling because the purpose is immoral. In contrast, Nora's total reliance on her husband to think for her is seen clearly in the preparations for the costume ball, 'Torvald dear, couldn't you take me in hand and settle what character I am to appear in?' Nora's infantile submission to her husband, 'Without you I am utterly helpless', enables Helmer's misogyny. Nora's complicity in Helmer's prejudice against women is blameworthy. The effect becomes suffocating, leading to a gloomy vision.
5. Awaiting her husband's return from murdering Duncan, Lady Macbeth, in contrast to Nora, shows her control of the situation. She 'drugged' the guards' drinks, and 'laid their daggers ready' for Macbeth to use to incriminate them in the crime of murdering Duncan. At this stage of the play, she surpasses Macbeth's power. Yet the vision is horrifying. This independent woman is an equal partner to her husband, not in creating good, but in committing murder.

6. While Shakespeare paints a picture of an independent, ambitious Lady Macbeth, our admiration for her is tarnished with revulsion. A woman's opportunity to be equal has become warped. This results in making the outlook at the start of Shakespeare's tragedy grim. In contrast, Nora's acceptance of the nineteenth century's allotted role of subservient woman is nauseating, 'correct and teach me'. Her willing acceptance of an inferior role in the marriage, despite the fact that both she and Helmer only want what is good for the family, succeeds in creating an equally dark vision.

(590 words)

Examiner's Comment

- ◆ Good, clear overview responding to the question, focusing on the mode and taking a comparative stance.
- ◆ Unusual comparison – addressing misogyny in Ibsen play with lack of evidence of misogyny in *Macbeth*.
- ◆ Interesting contrast between purposes of the two central couples, ironically creating an outlook gloomy in both plays.
- ◆ Effective use of apt and accurate reference to Nora's relationship with Torvald – particularly in paragraphs 2 and 4.
- ◆ Assured expression and controlled language use throughout.
- ◆ Top-grade standard, overall – although some discussion about the development of the vision in both plays would have been welcome.