

# Literary Genre 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

### Literary Genre

'The author's use of imagery and symbolism can help to create the mood in a text.'

- (b) With reference to **two other texts** on your comparative course, compare the extent to which the author's use of imagery and symbolism helped to create the mood in these texts. Develop your answer with reference to the texts. (40)

## Sample Answer

1. The disturbing mood in 'Macbeth' is created through the imagery of light, darkness and blood. In contrast, Ibsen makes good use of the symbolism of a Christmas tree and macaroons in 'A Doll's House'. This reveals the deception behind the glossy surface of Nora and Helmer Torvald's cosy relationship.
2. Shakespeare uses emotionally charged language to create an image of uncertainty, 'fair is foul and foul is fair'. Evil lurks under the cover of darkness. When plotting the murder of Duncan, Macbeth asks the stars to 'let not light see my dark and deep desires'. Similarly, Lady Macbeth wishes to conceal her evil ambitions in 'thick night' and under 'the blanket of the dark'. Later, when filled with guilt, she demands to have 'light by her continually'. The phrase, 'Out, out brief candle' vividly conjures up Macbeth's final despair. Shakespeare has used the imagery of light and darkness to establish a feeling of insecurity in this unsettling story.
3. Ibsen, in contrast, uses symbolism: the hidden meaning in an object to record another morally ambivalent mood. The Christmas tree is usually regarded as decorative. In this play, the tree symbolises Nora's position in the Torvald household. She is a plaything, a 'doll' to her husband who enjoys her pleasing looks and charm. But the pretty decorations also symbolise a darker truth, Nora's hidden lies. She and the tree will soon stand revealed. Stage directions describe the Christmas tree 'stripped of its ornaments and with burnt-down candle-ends'. This mirrors Nora's intense agitation, 'alone in the room, walking about uneasily'. She fears the discovery of her secret borrowing from Krogstad. Her distress is echoed in the 'dishevelled branches' of the tree. It represents how the cosy impression of the Torvald household is about to be ripped away.
4. Blood imagery fills Shakespeare's tragedy, establishing a tone of violence. Macbeth's sword 'smoked with bloody execution'. The festive banquet scene is interrupted by the ghost of Banquo shaking his 'gory locks' at Macbeth. Later on, when confronted by Macduff, Macbeth is forced to admit his terrible crime, 'my soul is too much charged with blood of thine already'. Shakespeare has used the imagery of blood to reveal an atmosphere of treachery throughout the play.
5. In contrast to this violent image of blood, Ibsen uses the symbol of macaroons. Yet he also uncovers a dark world, Torvald's complete control over his childlike wife. He has 'outlawed' macaroons because he is 'worried that they'll ruin' Nora's teeth. Torvald has a certain vision of how Nora should look, not only for his pleasure, but to stir envy in others at his good fortune. Nora's first acts of independence emerge when she secretly eats macaroons, putting 'the macaroon bag in her pocket and wiping her mouth'. After her lively performance of the tarantella dance, she demands macaroons be served at dinner. Nora's mild middle-class

image of the submissive wife is being cast aside and her inner passions are coming to the surface. Ibsen has used the symbol of the macaroons to establish a mood of rebellion.

6. Both playwrights have created disturbing moods in their dramas. Shakespeare has used the imagery of darkness and blood to reflect violence while Ibsen has used the symbolism of the Christmas tree and macaroons to suggest the pretence and deception within the Torvald home.

*(590 words)*

### Examiner's Comment

- ◆ Clear introduction contrasting how moods are established through imagery and symbolism to create distinctive atmospheres in both plays.
- ◆ Good detailed reference and accurate quotation support the development of discussion points throughout – and particularly in paragraphs 3 and 5.
- ◆ The response ranges over the two chosen texts and uses a comparative approach. Commentary remains focused firmly on the question and is rooted in the literary genre mode.
- ◆ Expression is confident and well controlled – with no spelling or grammar errors.
- ◆ Top-grade answer rounded off effectively in the concluding paragraph.