

Literary Genre Comparative Study Q (b) 40-Mark Sample

Macbeth and *Room*

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)

Room (Emma Donoghue)

- ◆ 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

'A variety of techniques can be used to heighten our experience of cruelty and suffering in texts.'

- (b) Identify and compare the extent to which at least one technique is used to heighten your experience of cruelty and suffering in **two other** texts on your comparative course. Develop your answer with reference to the texts. You may refer to the same or different techniques in each of your chosen texts. (40)

Sample Answer

1. Literary genre refers to the way authors tell their stories. The authors in my two comparative texts used minor characters in different ways to increase my understanding of cruelty and suffering. In Emma Donoghue's novel 'Room', the minor characters increase the central character's suffering by their unkindness and thoughtlessness. In Shakespeare's play 'Macbeth', minor characters intensify the central character's torment and also expose the misery caused by Macbeth in the rest of Scotland.
2. I was shocked at how the paparazzi and TV interviewer with 'puffy hair' are all only concerned with getting a sensational news 'story' rather than revealing the injustices of the victims. The paparazzi are described as vultures. They surround Ma and Jack as they get out of the police car after their dramatic rescue. The media's report is only interested in sensationalising the story with a dramatic news headline, 'HOPE FOR A BONSAI BOY'. The interviewer is heartless, throwing the questions at Ma. For example, was she comfortable about her deceiving of Jack? They even ask Ma if she misses being behind a locked door. The interviewer has a negative effect on Ma who later tries to commit suicide. When I saw the actions of the media as minor characters, I became very aware of the pain they inflicted on their victims.
3. In 'Macbeth', the witches have the same effect. But their actions are more vicious. The witches deceive Macbeth through their deliberate lies, 'Fair is foul, and foul is fair'. They convince him he can never be defeated 'until Birnam Wood' comes 'to Dunsinane hill' which he thinks is impossible. Macbeth then gets more confidence. He no longer holds back and terror is unleashed on Scotland. The minor characters of the witches intensify my experience of pain in the play which they have this effect.
4. Pilar is guilty of unkindness in 'Room'. She is Dr Clay's assistant in the psychiatric hospital where Ma and Jack are receiving treatment. She allows Jack to see himself on TV. The negative reporting is sensational and Jack gets agitated. He calls out to his mother who is in with the doctor. I was astonished that a doctor's assistant would be so insensitive. Dr Clay is even angry with her, 'he says mad things to Pilar'. Another minor character's thoughtlessness has increased Jack's suffering here.
5. In my play, Macduff reports on how Macbeth's cruelty is destroying Scotland, 'Each new morn, new widows cry'. But Macbeth has been convinced by the witches that he cannot be beaten so, in horror, I watched him go into battle. These minor characters not only increase Macbeth's suffering in the same way as the media have done to Jack, they also expose the damage done by Macbeth's brutality within his own country.

6. My play and novel use minor characters in different ways to reveal suffering and cruelty. I noticed that the heartlessness of the minor characters of the media and Pilar increased Ma and Jack's suffering. In my play I noticed that the minor characters deepened Macbeth's suffering but also exposed the suffering of the country due to Macbeth's cruelty.

(515 words)

Examiner's Comment

- ◆ Solid mid-grade answer that makes a reasonably good attempt to address the question by focusing on the relative impact of minor characters as a literary technique.
- ◆ Engagement to a limited extent with both prescribed texts, with some effective use of relevant reference to key moments.
- ◆ Discussion points lack development, particularly in paragraphs 4 and 5.
- ◆ Much more use could have been made of the different kinds of suffering (physical, psychological, etc.) experienced in the play, e.g. by Macduff and his family.
- ◆ Expression is generally functional and often repetitive. Syntax is sometimes awkward (e.g. in paragraphs 2 and 4). There are also minor misquotes.