

Theme or Issue 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

Theme or Issue

'The same theme or issue can appear more relevant to life today in some texts than in others.'

- (b) In relation to **two other** texts on your comparative course, compare the aspects of those texts that, in your opinion, made your chosen theme or issue more or less relevant to life today. Develop your answer with reference to your chosen texts. (40)

Sample Answer

1. The theme of isolation is explored in 'Macbeth' and 'Room'. The modern psychological novel, in my opinion, engages the reader of today much more deeply than the tragic play. Donoghue's story details the involuntary isolation of Ma and Jack by Old Nick in a small room and their later adjustment to life outside. In contrast, Shakespeare explores the voluntary isolation of Macbeth who withdraws into his own paranoid world of ambition.
2. The limited perspective of the innocent five-year-old narrator Jack quickly establishes an emotional connection to the contemporary reader. His detailed description of his favourite toy, Eggsnake, made of course by Ma, 'His tongue is a needle that keeps the red thread going right through him', shows how Ma has done what she can to give Jack happy experiences. This rings true for life today. The reader is keenly aware of the poignant irony when Jack confidently declares, 'When I was a little kid I thought like a little kid, but now I'm five I know everything'. We know all the hard truths with which he has yet to struggle.
3. In contrast to the close connection established between the reader and Jack's isolation through his limited perspective, Shakespeare uses soliloquies to connect the reader to Macbeth. His analysis of the witches' prophecy that he will be Thane of Cawdor is less associated with life as it is lived today, 'This supernatural soliciting cannot be ill, cannot be good'. His isolation is noted by Banquo, 'Look, how our partner's rapt'. But Macbeth has chosen to withdraw from company, unlike Jack who was imprisoned.
4. The aspect of adjusting to a new reality as a result of isolation is more closely linked to modern life in 'Room' than in 'Macbeth'. Jack, who had grown up in such strange circumstances, is well positioned as a keen observer of the world. He says some interesting things about how people live in today's world. 'In the world I notice persons are really stressed and have no time.' This is so unlike his former world in Room, 'me and Ma had time for everything'. He also notices how adults treat children, 'don't seem to like them, not even parents do'. These shrewd observations cause the reader of today to think more deeply about their own lives and relationships.
5. Throughout the play, as Macbeth increasingly isolates himself, he also comments on his new reality. But unlike Jack who observes the new outside world, Macbeth is fixated on his own interior life. His soliloquies reveal his loneliness. He recognises that in his pursuit of power, he has sacrificed and destroyed everything, his country, his friends, his peace of mind, even his wife. But the comment, 'my way of life is fallen into the sere' has less relevance for life today than Jack's intelligent observations.

6. The theme of isolation, Jack's captivity and release, and Macbeth's self-imposed loneliness, are all explored in my two comparative texts. The features such as up-to-date dialogue and viewpoint used by Donoghue connect more closely with the modern reader than the formal soliloquies of Macbeth. Jack's perceptive comments on his new reality echo more closely to the world of today than Macbeth's list of regret at all he has lost, 'that which should accompany old age as honour love obedience troops of friends'. The theme of isolation is more relevant to life today, in my opinion, in 'Room' rather than in 'Macbeth'.

(570 words)

Examiner's Comment

- ◆ Clear introduction identifies a common theme and names two prescribed comparative texts.
- ◆ Some insightful discussion; however, wider consideration of the different settings and language of the two texts would have enhanced the analysis.
- ◆ Perceptive point at the end of paragraph 5 needed further explanation.
- ◆ Good focus on mode and sustained comparative approach throughout.
- ◆ Expression is well controlled with accurate use of apt quotation.
- ◆ Effective concluding paragraph rounds off this solid high-grade response.