



**General Certificate of Education
June 2012**

Classical Civilisation 2020

CIV3C: Greek Tragedy

Report on the Examination

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CIV3C Greek Tragedy

General Comments

As is now usual for CIV3, this was by far the most popular unit of the four. The standard of the best work was excellent, and there were some scripts of outstanding quality. Many students had well-developed analytical and critical skills which they demonstrated in their answers to the 10 and 20-mark questions. There was encouraging evidence of sophisticated judgement, sensitivity and perception, particularly in responses to the synoptic questions, and of some excellent and committed teaching. A number of schools had empowered their students to use the appropriate technical language, though weaker students tended to scatter the terminology liberally in ignorance of its meaning. There is still a visible tendency for the less sophisticated students to provide narrative rather than analytical answers, or to use everything they remember about a particular topic, whether appropriate to the question or not. More generally, there is still a noticeable failure to support statements with references to the *plays*.

Section One

Option A

Most answers to Question 01 were able to identify Oedipus' interlocutor as the Corinthian messenger who has arrived with the news of Polybus' death; he reveals the details of his acquisition of Oedipus from Laius' servant and delivery to his adoptive parents. Jocasta, who has been encouraging Oedipus to treat Polybus' death as a release from his fears, now begins to see the truth and tries to prevent Oedipus from summoning Laius' old shepherd as the next step. Too many responses, however, either embellished the extract on the question paper, or recapitulated the entire play, and sometimes the back-story too. Good answers to Question 02 connected this scene with earlier scenes with Teiresias, Creon and Jocasta, for a view of the fears and (not unreasonable) paranoia, and the resultant short fuse inherent in Oedipus' nature as contributory factors to his behaviour, his past actions, and his insistence on finding out the truth despite its likely prejudicial nature. Answers to Question 03 were of very variable quality: most saw the inherent contradictions in Oedipus' Theban family, and their reflection on the values of the classical *oikos* structure and its relationships, but others, clinging to the quotation, made more than is really there in the text of the loving relationship with Polybus & Merope. The prologue, with the loving Oedipus empathising with his extended Theban family, was frequently treated well as was the *exodos* with Oedipus and the children.

Option B

Good answers to Question 04 were able to explain that Jason has married Creon's daughter, which deprives Medea of a formal status in a foreign country as his wife and the mother of his children. Creon has exiled her for fear of her reaction, but Medea has extracted leave to stay for a further day to make necessary arrangements, which will allow her to take revenge. Jason tries to reason with Medea who rejects him in this speech. Poorer answers, as with Question 01, tended to re-capitulate both play and past history at length. Most students were able to respond to Question 05 by relating the dialogue to other evidence of Jason's and Medea's personalities. Many answers to Question 06 discussed the scene successfully as more important for character development than for the plot; answers which foregrounded alternative scenes were given credit if they made a well-supported case.

Section Two

Option C

Question 07 was significantly the less popular of the two synoptic questions. For those students who did attempt it, it was difficult to establish that they could define “dramatic irony”, let alone analyse it. *Oedipus the King* should have provided a substantial basis for discussion – the audience know much more than he does, and almost everything he says is double edged. The other three plays perhaps make less obvious use of the device, but we might note that in *Hippolytus* our pity is perhaps moved by what we know will happen to him and our knowledge of his fate will affect the view we take of Theseus’ treatment of him, and also probably our reception of Phaedra. *Antigone* is perhaps the least ironic of all the plays, though there is a reversal of fortune which will contribute to our appreciation of the twists of the plot; the view we take of Creon will be fuelled by our knowledge of the outcome of his adherence to principles which are not wrong by one set of standards, and which he views as universal and impersonal rules of good government but will lead to disaster of a particularly personal and domestic kind in the loss of his wife and son. The plot and outcomes of *Medea* are enhanced dramatically by our knowledge of her intentions and duplicity, and the extent to which she manages to manipulate other characters, despite their distrust. Examiners found it very surprising that *Oedipus the King* was often poorly explored; in *Hippolytus*, although Aphrodite tells the audience what the outcome will be, few explored the play from that perspective. The hints of what was to happen in *Medea* were rarely noted, and there was a general assumption that there was no dramatic irony in *Antigone*.

Option D

Question 08, perhaps predictably, was much more popular, and there were some admirable answers, which managed their analyses thematically, and differentiated between plays and playwrights successfully, even when seeing the major female characters in all four plays as essentially subverters of male structures. Some key points, recognised in many essays, included Jocasta’s formal position versus her real relationship with Oedipus, Antigone’s view of her family and religious responsibilities as against her legal position (as defined by Creon); Ismene’s tendency to take the line of least resistance, Phaedra’s dilemma about her honour and her compulsion, and the Nurse’s rather different approach to the situation; Medea’s sense of her relationship with her children as against her future needs. Few students differentiated between the human and the divine. Some of the best answers made a successful connection between the plays and the formal role of Athenian women which they might be seen to question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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