



**General Certificate of Education**

**Drama and Theatre Studies 2241**

**Unit 3      Further Prescribed Plays**  
**including Pre-Twentieth Century**

**Report on the Examination**

*2010 examination - January series*

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### **Unit 3 – Further Prescribed Plays including Pre-Twentieth Century**

#### ***General***

In this, the very first series of the new A2 written paper, examiners reported seeing a wide range of achievement. It was evident that many candidates were well-prepared for the precise demands of DRAM3. Unfortunately, there were also several instances seen where candidates seemed to be under-prepared for the specific requirements of the paper, especially in relation to Section B.

Both sections of the paper require candidates to reveal a creative overview of their chosen plays; Section B requires an interpretation of the extract set. The best candidates met the requirements of the paper with some assurance while the weaker ones appeared oblivious to these aspects of the set tasks.

Candidates for this January series had had one term to master their chosen set texts and it was clear that some were thoroughly immersed in the world of their chosen play in each section. Some very good scripts were seen which demonstrated secure knowledge of each of the set plays selected as well as clear understanding of the potential of each text to create specific effects for an audience. As always, the best candidates addressed the precise demands of their chosen questions immediately and then maintained a tight focus upon these throughout their answers.

Weaker candidates appeared to have an unequal level of knowledge and understanding across Sections A and B, suggesting that they were not, in fact, quite ready to meet the challenges of the paper in relation to one or the other of their chosen texts. This resulted in an uneven achievement across the script.

Weaker scripts were also more likely to contain under-developed and/or very brief responses which were often very superficial in content or approach.

Examiners reported seeing a number of scripts that lacked the necessary support of reference to specific moments from the set text in action in both parts of the paper. In Section B, too many candidates referred exclusively to line numbers rather than to lines of speech, robbing their answers of the immediacy that comes from brief quotation in support of practical ideas.

Candidates may need to be reminded that they must justify their practical suggestions as well as illustrate their ideas with close reference to the text in action. Examiners reported seeing some answers where candidates offered inappropriate ideas with no attempt made to justify their application. This was very noticeable in some Section B responses where the complete cohort of candidates interpreted the given section in identical (yet unorthodox) ways.

Nevertheless, examiners reported seeing many very good answers containing intelligent discussion and purposeful textual references, which brought their clearly explained practical suggestions vividly to theatrical life. Where candidates had engaged fully with their Section B texts, their directorial approaches were often quite inspired.

There were also a number of narrative answers which did little more than relay the events of the printed extract with little or no invention.

Some candidates under-achieved in this series because they appeared not to have a sound understanding of the original context of their selected plays.

Other candidates attempted to justify transposing their set play to an unsuitable alternative period or setting. Weaker candidates were liable to assert their ideas without the necessary justification and then failed to provide a convincing argument or any argument at all in support of their ideas.

The demand in Section B that candidates should include a sketch appeared to take some candidates by surprise and there were quite a number of candidates who penalised themselves by the omission of a sketch/diagram to support their design ideas.

As has been reported on many occasions, some weaker candidates revealed an inadequate understanding of design fundamentals.

Examiners also reported seeing some sketches, plans and diagrams which were not labelled usefully or were very small indeed and were therefore of little help in supporting the answers offered.

Candidates need to be reminded that both the clarity of their expression and their accuracy in the use of specialist theatre terminology is taken into account in the assessment of their responses. Examiners noted a continuing decline in the accurate use of terminology as candidates struggled to identify stage positions or name basic lighting effects/equipment.

In a tiny minority of cases, some candidates failed to use the question paper to find the set extract for Section B but answered instead on the corresponding pages from the texts they had with them in the exam. This mistake should not have occurred given the reference to the printed extract in the question and the instruction 'Turn over for the first extract', leaving 14 pages of question paper unlooked at. There is also a specimen paper as well as this first January operational paper and candidates should become familiar with the layout and requirements of the exam paper rather than meeting it for the first time in the exam room.

## ***Section A – Pre-Twentieth Century Plays***

### ***The Revenger's Tragedy***

#### ***Question 1(a)***

Examiners saw several very successful responses to this question, although there were also many disappointing answers in evidence.

The most common failing noted was the absence of a clearly identified preferred response to Gratiana, without which the performance ideas were purposeless. Where candidates did identify their preferred response, examiners saw a range of ideas; some candidates viewed the character as wholly sympathetic which was often not well justified given her attitude towards her daughter's chastity. Others attempted to do rather too much in their answers and offered different potential responses for almost every line considered.

Better candidates chose their sections wisely in order to reveal more of an overview of the character who they identified as being part of the court and country antithesis in the play. These candidates were generally sensitive to the original context of the play and to the features of the genre of Jacobean comedy.

Weaker candidates sometimes chose their two 'sections' from different parts of the same scene, thus depriving themselves of the opportunity to show the changing attitudes of the character

and thus the potential for different responses from the audience. Where both 'sections' were chosen from the early scenes of the play, no 'overview' was achieved.

Weaker candidates made little or no reference to the play's period or genre. There were some unjustified transpositions to a contemporary setting where candidates, perhaps influenced by a recent production, reduced Gratiana's social status to 'working-class housewife in an apron'. This transposition, which was rarely, if ever, justified in the answers, revealed a complete lack of understanding of the complex background to Gratiana's comparatively 'lowly' status as a distressed gentlewoman, widow to a courtier and mother to another courtier.

As always, the best answers focused on specific sections which were used to illustrate moments of performance calculated exactly to achieve clearly stated and appropriate responses from the audience.

Some candidates revealed insecurity in their knowledge of the twists and turns of the plot of this complex play.

### **Question 1(b)**

Although not selected by many candidates, this question produced some imaginative designs for the play with the potential to communicate its darkly comic atmosphere.

There were some inventive suggestions for presenting the corruption of the Duke's court which better candidates treated with some imagination and wit. For example, one candidate suggested a running theme of skull motifs in the costumes and set dressings found in the court. Another concept involved the use of black and white as the dominant colour palette, with occasional flashes of red seen in scarves, shoes and hair decorations.

Weaker candidates displayed limitations in their understanding of how design can contribute to the atmosphere of a play.

Some candidates mis-read the question and wrote about lighting and sound design as well as, or instead of, set and costume design. Other weaker candidates failed to address the notion of 'darkly comic' in their answers and simply appeared to offer designs that had been pre-prepared but which offered little by way of 'darkly comic'.

Nevertheless, there was evidence of some careful thought about the overall design concept for this play with careful attention accorded to use of space, to scale, colour and texture in the ideas for setting. Costume ideas were occasionally very well conceived and detailed. Candidates who had thought about costume accessories - outrageous headgear, frilly garters, bondage gear - were often able to introduce more comedy into their ideas. There were also some humorous interpretations of the bed attire of the Duke and Duchess for the scene where they are 'rudely awoken' in the night.

Better candidates who introduced anachronistic costumes or accessories into an otherwise mainly Jacobean setting always remembered to justify their additions.

## ***Tartuffe***

### **Question 2(a)**

This was the more popular question. As in the previous series, many candidates who had studied *Tartuffe* devoted too much time and space to peripheral matters rather than tackling the role of Mariane directly. Thus examiners reported seeing lengthy introductions about the nature of Molière's comic style, its origins in commedia dell'arte and the difficulties that Molière encountered in the face of objections to his play from religious zealots. This material detracted from rather than enhanced their work on Mariane.

As always, better candidates focused directly upon their presentation of Mariane as a sympathetic character and then explored the ways that this could be achieved in practical performance detail linked closely to the delivery of the text.

Most candidates wrote about Mariane's exchanges with Orgon and Dorine in Act Two; some also included Mariane's comic scene with Valère and good candidates also considered Mariane's performance in Act Four as she pleads with her father to reconsider the match with Tartuffe.

Good candidates had considered methods of eliciting sympathy through comedy as well as, or instead of, emphasising the pathos or sentimentality of the role.

Weaker candidates merely described the action of the scenes with negligible invention.

### **Question 2(b)**

This was also a popular question and it attracted some very well informed responses as well as some very weak ones.

Better candidates showed some apt understanding of the period setting of the play as well as of its comic style and both were reflected in the offered designs. Some candidates acknowledged the original period of the play but chose to transpose the action to modern day. This was occasionally effective, but also occasionally very poorly supported. Some candidates offered no justification at all for their transposition and their ideas lacked coherence of approach.

A surprising number of candidates offered no sketches to illustrate their ideas; some failed to identify specific moments from the play where their designs would accommodate the action particularly. Few candidates considered the need for concealment in two scenes from the play.

There were some suitable ideas for distinguishing between the more youthful and the older characters in terms of costume and Elmire's gowns were frequently 'designed' around the need to reveal her bosom. Examiners reported seeing a number of answers where candidates simply adopted commedia style costume without any further explanation other than to make a brief link between Molière and the commedia tradition.

Although there were some very well researched costume ideas evident, examiners also reported seeing answers from candidates who lacked the necessary terminology to attempt a design question and where references to both set and costume failed to create a sense of period.

## ***The Recruiting Officer***

### **Question 3(a)**

There were quite a few answers to this question and examiners reported seeing some very comical renderings of Kite. However, there were also numerous answers that betrayed a lack of understanding of the character, especially in terms of his precise rank and relationship with Plume.

Many candidates concentrated their attention on the opening scene and the scene in which Kite recruits Pearmain and Appletree in Act Two, Scene Three. There were some weaker candidates who simply appeared to begin at the beginning of the play, directing every line of Kite's from Scene One until they had run out of time. This resulted in a restricted overview of the character.

Better candidates gave appropriate attention to the sections where there is most comic potential and there were some inventive strategies for realising Kite 'the conjuror'. Others omitted this scene entirely and thereby missed opportunities for comedy.

Farquhar's comedy of manners and wit is rarely best served by a crude slapstick approach. This was unfortunately one of the styles that many weaker candidates resorted to when they were stuck for directorial invention of their own.

### **Question 3(b)**

This was the less popular option although there were some successful answers seen.

Some careless candidates failed to read the question closely and examiners reported seeing some answers where the chosen scenes featured one or other of the characters but not both. Candidates who wrote about Melinda's exchanges with Silvia or Worthy's conversations with Plume, for example, failed to meet the demands of the question and these sections were disregarded by the examiners.

There were some quite detailed ideas for the casting of the roles which was better when clearly linked to the candidates' intended effects for the audience. Less successful were answers that spent up to half their length on casting suggestions, none of which appeared to contribute to conveying the nature of the relationship for the audience.

Many candidates included detailed suggestions for costume. Once again, these suggestions were useful where they supported specific directorial ideas; they were less helpful when they were offered as a substitute for purposeful direction of the pair.

Better candidates referred closely to the text in order to illustrate their answers and they gave appropriate attention to the delivery of specific lines. The scenes where the 'lovers' appear together are relatively few and it was disappointing that so many candidates omitted their final 'reckoning' and reconciliation scene.

Weaker candidates did not use the text appropriately to lend immediacy to their suggestions which were not always entirely appropriate. Better candidates always considered the style of the play and reflected it in their directorial ideas.

## ***The Servant of Two Masters***

### **Question 4(a)**

This play was the most popular choice in Section A and examiners reported seeing many very amusing responses as well as plenty of uninventive attempts.

One recurrent mistake reported by examiners was candidates' apparent inability to distinguish between what might be useful reference to the commedia tradition, either offered in a brief introduction to the answer or as part of the developing response, and what was simply irrelevant background material that served only to distract the candidate from the focus of the question.

The history of commedia and contemporary attitudes to Goldoni's introduction of script often fell into the second category. In some cases, candidates spent up to 3 pages of their answer books rambling on about commedia characters other than the zanni and only found their focus on Truffaldino and Smeraldina at the end of their answers. This work was invariably rushed and rarely comical.

As with the question on *The Recruiting Officer*, some careless candidates failed to read the question closely and examiners reported seeing some answers where the chosen scenes featured one or other of the characters, invariably Truffaldino, but not both.

There were some quite detailed ideas for the casting of the roles; often these were linked to commedia conventions. They were occasionally linked to the purpose of the question; to create comedy. Less successful were answers that spent up to half their length on casting and costume suggestions, none of which appeared to contribute to the creation of comedy or to presenting the whirlwind courtship.

Many candidates focused on Truffaldino's antagonism towards Pantaloon in the first Act rather than on his interaction with Smeraldina.

The scene in Act Two where Truffaldino and Smeraldina meet outside Brighella's inn was often given the most consistently comic treatment. Some candidates failed to notice that the question required three scenes or, if they did, they assumed mistakenly that each 'scene' could be taken from the same set of exchanges between the pair.

### **Question 4(b)**

Examiners saw several very successful, and some very comical, responses to this question, although there were also many disappointing answers offered.

The most common failing noted was the absence of a clearly identified preferred response to Beatrice, without which the performance ideas were purposeless. Where candidates did identify their preferred response, it was invariably a comic one, although some candidates recognised the pathos behind Beatrice's situation and invited some audience sympathy for her in her disclosure of her true identity to Clarice as well as in the scene where she attempts to hang herself.

Answers on Beatrice also suffered from over-long preambles about which commedia character she might be played as, often to the detriment of the answer. Similarly pointless diversions took in gender politics in the seventeenth century to little effect.



Errors were frequently seen in candidates' work about when, if ever, Beatrice appears as a woman.

### ***Lady Windermere's Fan***

#### **Question 5(a)**

This was an extremely popular play and the option on 'Tuppy' received the majority of answers.

Better candidates began by stating their preferred response to Lord Augustus and whether it was amusement, irritation or sympathy, this gave them a clear focus for their envisaged performance. Weaker candidates, by omitting this vital aspect of the question, tended simply to describe what they would do; how they would stand and how 'posh' they would sound.

As always, the best answers focused on specific sections which were used to illustrate moments of performance, calculated exactly to achieve clearly stated and appropriate responses from the audience.

Unfortunately, there were many candidates who revealed a lack of understanding of the role and a large number of candidates merely referred to Tuppy's opening dialogue with Lord Windermere in Act Two and his final appearance at the end of the play when he announces his forthcoming marriage to Mrs Erlynne.

Relatively few candidates included examples of the exchanges between Tuppy and Mrs Erlynne and there was a general dearth of scripts revealing a secure overview of the significance of Tuppy's role within the play as a whole.

#### **Question 5(b)**

This was the less popular option although it elicited significant numbers of responses, covering a wide range of achievement.

The question required candidates to discuss how their setting design ideas would accommodate the action of the scenes as well as suggesting an appropriate period and style for the play. There were not many answers seen that fulfilled each of these requirements satisfactorily.

Most candidates were able to outline a setting design; many revealed some knowledge of the style of high quality furnishings in the late nineteenth century but few candidates went beyond listing the items of furniture that Lord Windermere might have in his drawing room. Limited stage sense was in evidence.

Good candidates began by referring to the style and period of the play; they outlined some design fundamentals, including entrances and exits and they considered transitions. Better candidates thought about the practicality of the ballroom and terrace areas and they supplied an appropriate hiding place for Lady Windermere and Mrs Erlynne in Lord Darlington's rooms.

Good candidates always provided a sketch to support their ideas.

Weaker candidates often failed to supply a sketch and, not infrequently, they ignored the demand of the question to accommodate the action of the play. Some candidates who opted for this question appeared not to have given much thought to the design requirements of the play prior to setting pen to paper.

## ***The Seagull***

### **Question 6(a)**

This was a popular question although it was not always well handled. Some candidates revealed a good understanding of Masha's role and function within *The Seagull* but they often wrote in quite a literary way. Others revealed a more practical understanding of Masha's character.

Many candidates failed to identify a potential audience response to Masha, thus making any performance ideas that they did have fairly purposeless. It was also disappointing to find a return to the Stanislavski approach being offered in place of concrete performance ideas. The questions on this paper will never require rehearsal details but will always expect candidates to envisage their set play unfolding on stage.

Almost all candidates considered Masha's first entrance and her exchange with Medvedenko. Some candidates referred to Medvedenko as Masha's husband throughout their answers beginning with the opening scene where 'her husband' trailed behind her as she moped and moaned.

Three sections were stipulated in the question and there were some candidates who fulfilled this requirement; however, there were also candidates who offered only one or two sections and their achievement was affected accordingly.

Better candidates chose sections which involved interaction with a variety of characters and they were able to create a more rounded picture of Masha and consequently a range of potential responses to her plight.

### **Question 6(b)**

This was the less popular option although there were some very successful answers seen and some very sensitive responses to the relationship.

As mentioned above, some careless candidates failed to read the question sufficiently closely and did not notice that the question demanded at least two scenes (many concentrated exclusively on the exchanges between Arkadina and Trigorin in Act 3). Some other candidates failed to note the requirement to consider only scenes where the pair appears together.

Examiners reported seeing a significant number of answers where the chosen scenes featured Konstantin complaining about his mother or about Trigorin or featured exchanges between Trigorin and Nina.

More than one candidate wrote about Arkadina's relationship with her son instead of with her lover.

There were some quite detailed ideas for the casting of the roles, although these were often based on a misunderstanding of the relative ages of the characters. Some less successful candidates wrote several paragraphs about costume which added little to the nature of the relationship.

Some candidates offered little more than character sketches.

Better candidates referred closely to the text in order to illustrate their answers and they gave appropriate and sensitive attention to the delivery of specific lines. Many candidates looked at the opening Act and Act Three or they looked at Act Three and the final Act. Some very good work was seen.

Weaker candidates offered a potted history of Chekhov's career and his relationship with Stanislavski, all of which was irrelevant.

### **Section B - The Twentieth Century or Contemporary Drama**

As the question set in Section B is the same for all set texts, it is worth making the following general points about the way in which candidates approached the new style of question.

Better candidates:

- offered an interpretation of the printed extract that revealed their understanding of the extract and of the play from which it was taken
- considered the audience experience that they were aiming to achieve through their direction
- attempted to communicate meaning to the audience through each of the directorial decisions they made
- included clear evidence of **relevant** research embedded in their answers, where appropriate, informing their practical, directorial ideas
- provided sketches of adequate size – about a third of a page - they were clearly labelled, and they related to the necessary traffic of the scene and were compatible with the play as a whole

Weaker candidates:

- wrote **exclusively** about staging issues: choice of stage configuration, set and costume design, lighting and sound effects and failed to offer a single idea about how they might direct their cast
- spent almost all of their answers writing casting and costume suggestions, often betraying a very limited understanding of how casting and costume convey meaning to an audience
- prefaced their ideas with potted biographies of the respective playwrights which had no bearing on the interpretation of the extract
- wrote at length about their intentions for the audience, for example, 'I would want to increase the tension here', but then found themselves at a loss about how to achieve that in practical directorial terms
- wrote about one or two lines of text in great detail but did not give a sense of understanding either of the rest of the extract or of the play from which it was taken
- swamped their answers with references to research that was:
  - purely biographical, or
  - purely literary, or
  - gratuitous and/or clearly irrelevant to their interpretation of the extract
- simply narrated the action of the extract and offered neither interpretation nor meaning to the reader/audience
- sketches:
  - many weaker candidates failed to include a useful sketch
  - some provided a sketch crammed into three lines of their answer books with little or no labelling

- some offered a tiny sketch with so much labelling that it was impossible to see the sketch beneath it
- some drew empty rectangles with no detail inserted
- some candidates betrayed a lack of understanding by, for example, nominating a traverse stage setting but drawing a proscenium arch, or nominating theatre-in-the-round but putting a large structure in the centre of it, effectively blocking sight-lines for the whole audience at one time or another

These strengths and weaknesses were seen in relation to each of the texts. The following additional points are worth making in relation to specific texts.

### ***Blood Wedding***

#### ***Extract 7***

Candidates often selected as little as one or two lines to 'direct', having spent the rest of their time on relating the background to Lorca; referring to his homosexuality, to his relationship to the surrealists, to Dalí, to Picasso, to Andalusia, to the other plays in the rural trilogy. This information was almost never utilised in the answer and was therefore not made relevant.

### ***The Good Person of Szechwan***

#### ***Extract 8***

Candidates wrote at great length about Brechtian theory, about *Verfremdung* and *Spas* and gestic acting. This occasionally helped better candidates to interpret the extract and to clarify the political thrust of the play as a whole but often prevented them from understanding one of the most important aspects of this extract - Shen Teh is in love.

### ***A View from the Bridge***

#### ***Extract 9***

Examiners saw some exceptionally sensitive answers on this text. Weaker answers were prefaced by 'research' into McCarthy and/or the 'American Dream' which was then not utilised in the envisaged performance. Many candidates omitted the exchange between Rodolpho and Catherine at the start of the extract or the address to the audience by Alfieri at the end. Period costume was often inaccurately presented.

### ***The Trial***

#### ***Extract 10***

Weaker answers repeated Berkoff's stage directions without any further explanation; for example, 'the Chorus become gargoyles and angels' – how?

## ***Our Country's Good***

### ***Extract 11***

There was much reference to Brecht (occasionally referred to, variously, as 'Brett', 'Brent' or 'Brack') and Stanislavski. Many candidates appeared to have been in or seen student productions of the play and they imported ideas seen without offering any explanation or justification for the inclusion of the ideas that they had seen in production.

Many candidates had expected to write about the contrast between the convicts and the officers and they persisted in doing so despite the lack of opportunity to write about the convicts purposefully in relation to the extract.

'Research' was extensive and various but still did not prevent many candidates from revealing a lack of understanding about the position of Phillip or Harry in the hierarchy presented on stage in Scene Three. Many candidates appeared to believe that Harry had already hanged Handy Baker. The Aborigine was often as sorely neglected by the candidates as by the original colonisers.

## ***Coram Boy***

### ***Extract 12***

Weaker answers repeated the stage directions with no directorial input or they referred to ideas taken wholesale from the National Theatre production without either acknowledging their source or justifying their decisions. This was especially problematical in the decision taken by many candidates to have a chorus of the dead babies' mothers on stage, forming the background to the scene and to Meshak's 'dead state'. It is not in the text, so how did it turn into a directorial 'idea' or convey 'meaning' to an audience?

## **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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