



General Certificate of Education

Classical Civilisation

CIV3C Greek Tragedy

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – June series

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CIV3C: Greek Tragedy

General Comments

The examiners were pleased to see a substantial number of candidates for this examination, which was by far the most popular topic within CIV3. The standard of the best work was extremely high and there were some scripts of outstanding quality. Many candidates had well-developed analytical skills which they demonstrated in their answers to the 10 and 20-mark questions. There was little evidence of difficulty in time-management, though a few candidates devoted too much time to the 20-mark essay at the evident expense of the 40-mark synoptic question. There was encouraging evidence of sophisticated judgement, sensitivity and perception in responses to the literary questions, and of some excellent and committed teaching. However, all the examiners noted some candidates with extremely poor writing and spelling skills. There is a visible tendency for a few less sophisticated candidates to provide narrative rather than analytical answers, or to use everything they remember about a particular topic, whether appropriate to the question or not.

There was an even distribution of quality in the answers, including outstanding responses. Answers to both Questions 07 and 08 were often very sensitive and sophisticated readings of the plays and their dramaturgy and performance conventions, though Question 08's focus on the classic debate on the nature of the Tragic Hero attracted a large majority of the answers. Options A and B attracted roughly even numbers of responses, and candidates dealt well with their demands on close-reading, character-exploration and thematic expansion on the set passage in the context of the relevant play. That said, the examiners would like to draw attention to a significant number of scripts which penalised themselves by approaching questions on turning points or significance of selected passages by virtually ignoring the passage or theme in their eagerness to discuss something else. Further, some of the standard technical terms were scattered indiscriminately: *hubris* is not a blanket term for self-assertive behaviour. While there were some excellent synoptic essays, there were also too many which provided a separate narrative on each of the four plays but did not attempt thematic cross-reference.

Opinion A

Most answers to Question 01 reported on Jason's desertion of Medea for Glauce with its consequences for the status of their children and Medea herself, and outlined the importance of Medea's known past history, which prompts Creon's intention to exile her. Answers to Question 02 observed that the conversation between Medea and Creon reveals Medea's manipulative capacity in the face of what seems to be a firm decision on Creon's part. Answers to Question 03 were able to enlarge on these observations to show that the scene triggers much of what happens later on the basis of what we have already seen of Medea's character and capacities.

Option B

Answers to Question 04 noted Aphrodite's exposition of her intentions, the effects on Phaedra, the attempts by the Nurse to provide advice and help, and the reactions of Phaedra and Hippolytus to her interventions. Answers to Question 05 contrasted the violent language of Phaedra's speech to the Nurse with her normally much more controlled persona, though they were also conscious of her insistence on her honour. Few remarked on her blaming the Nurse for the outcomes of her self-revelation. Answers to Question 06 were able to expand on their analysis to show that this scene sets up Phaedra's suicide and the contingent outcomes for Theseus and Hippolytus himself.

Option C

There were some perceptive answers to Question 07, which considered the importance of engaging the audience from the beginning of the play, whether by getting into the plot at a significant but not initiatory part of the story, or by an attention-grabbing spectacle, or by introducing us to a major

character or divine motivator. The four prescribed plays allowed for some successful and imaginative thoughts about these tactics.

Option D

Answers to Question 08 tackled the Tragic Hero, Aristotelean or not, with enthusiasm and, in many cases, detailed knowledge of all four plays. The addition of *Medea* to the legacy prescription allowed for some interesting comparisons between the female leads. The examiners saw some excellent contributions to the pre-destination versus personal responsibility debate, the unresolvable dilemma of Antigone, and the consequences of inevitable but disastrous actions, all with great effect on an audience which knows the outcome.