

B O A R D O F S T U D I E S
NEW SOUTH WALES

HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

1998

**COMPARATIVE
LITERATURE**

DISTINCTION COURSE

(50 Marks)

*Time allowed—Three hours
(Plus 5 minutes reading time)*

DIRECTIONS TO CANDIDATES

- Attempt **THREE** questions, **ONE** from each Section.
- Question 1 is **COMPULSORY**.
- All questions are of equal value.
- Do **NOT** use substantially the same material in more than one answer.
- Answer each question in a **SEPARATE** Writing Booklet.
- You may ask for extra Writing Booklets if you need them.

SECTION I

QUESTION 1. This question is **COMPULSORY**.

The **FOUR** passages below are translations of an extract from the Ancient Greek play *The Bacchae* by Euripides. The extract is taken from the speech of a messenger who witnessed the fate of Pentheus, King of Thebes.

CONTEXT: Pentheus, King of Thebes, has forbidden his people to worship the new god, Dionysus (Bacchus). However the Theban women, including the King's mother, Agave and her sisters Ino and Autonoe, refuse to obey the King's ruling. Pentheus decides to go and watch the rites in honour of Dionysus, though he knows men are forbidden to do so. He dresses in women's clothes, and takes with him a servant and a mysterious foreign stranger (who has offered to act as a guide). The stranger (who is, in fact, Dionysus himself) helps the King climb into a tree to see the rites. The voice of the god draws the women's attention to the man watching their rites, and in a god-driven frenzy which prevents them from recognising the King, the women pull the King out of the tree and tear him to pieces. NOTE: Maenads are the followers of the god Dionysus.

Using **THREE** of the passages, write an essay showing the principal differences in the use of language in the three translations you are discussing **AND** what the effects of these differences are.

TRANSLATION 1

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QUESTION 1. (Continued)

TRANSLATION 2

Then Agave cried out: 'Maenads, make a circle
 about the trunk and grip it with your hands.
 Unless we take this climbing beast, he will reveal
 the secrets of the god.' With that, thousands of hands
 tore the fir tree from the earth, and down, down
 from his high perch fell Pentheus, tumbling
 to the ground, sobbing and screaming as he fell,
 for he knew his end was near. His own mother,
 like a priestess with her victim, fell upon him
 first. But snatching off his wig and snood
 so she would recognise his face, he touched her cheeks,
 screaming, 'No, no, Mother! I am Pentheus,
 your own son, the child you bore to Echion!
 Pity me, spare me, Mother! I have done a wrong,
 but do not kill your own son for my offense.'
 But she was foaming at the mouth, and her crazed eyes
 rolling with frenzy. She was mad, stark mad,
 possessed by Bacchus. Ignoring his cries of pity,
 she seized his left arm at the wrist; then, planting
 her foot upon his chest, she pulled, wrenching away
 the arm at the shoulder – not by her own strength,
 for the god had put inhuman power in her hands.

WILLIAM ARROWSMITH, 1959

Greenes Lattimore editions, University of Chicago Press, 1959

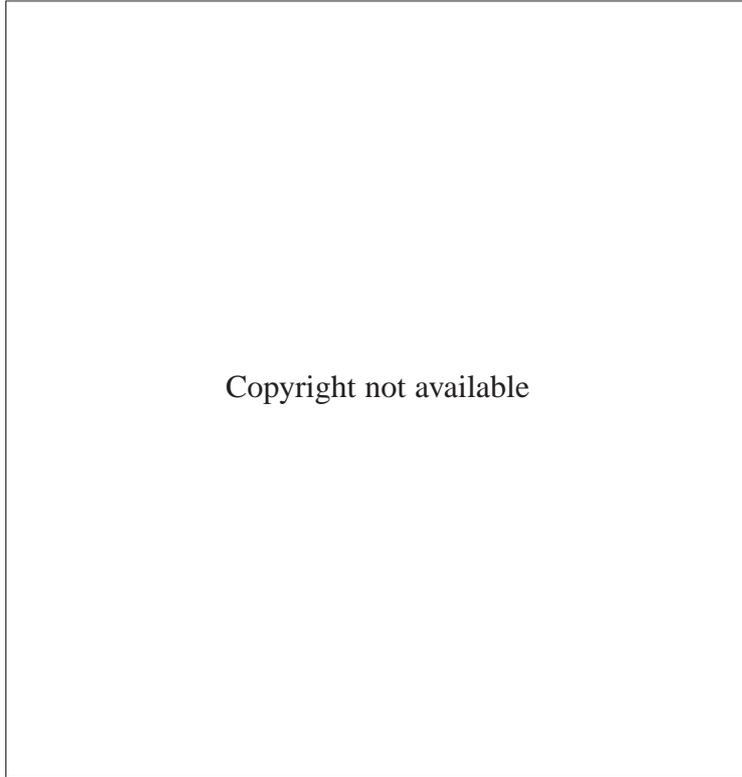
TRANSLATION 3

Agave spoke, 'Come all, and stand around,
 And grasp the tree, ye Maenads; soon we will seize
 The beast that rides thereon. He will ne'er betray
 The mysteries of our god.' A thousand hands
 Were on the ash, and tore it from the earth;
 And he that sat aloft, down, headlong, down
 Fell to the ground, with thousand piteous shrieks,
 Pentheus, for well he knew his end was near.
 His mother first began the sacrifice,
 And fell on him. His bonnet from his hair
 He threw, that she might know and so not slay him,
 The sad Agave. And he said, her cheek
 Fondling, 'I am thy child, thine own, my mother!
 Pentheus, whom in Echion's house you bare.
 Have mercy on me, mother! For his sins,
 Whatever be his sins, kill not thy son.'
 She, foaming at the mouth, her rolling eyeballs
 Whirling around, in her unreasoning reason,
 By Bacchus all possessed, knew, heeded not.
 She caught him in her arms, seized his right hand,
 And, with her feet set on his shrinking side,
 Tore out the shoulder—not with her own strength:
 The god made easy that too cruel deed.

MILMAN, 1908

QUESTION 1. (Continued)

TRANSLATION 4



SECTION II

Attempt ONE question.

Answer EITHER on two or three longer works OR on one longer work AND four or five poems or extracts.

Your answer must make reference to works from MORE THAN ONE module.

EITHER

QUESTION 2

The purpose of literature is to defamiliarise the familiar, to transform readers and their perceptions of the world.

Is this true of the literature you have studied in this course?

OR

QUESTION 3

It is the writer's job, so long as we are in the world of his fiction, to make insiders of us all.

Discuss this idea as you compare some of the different 'worlds' the texts of this course have proposed to you.

OR

QUESTION 4

If every text is a product of its social, historical and cultural context, can we legitimately compare texts across cultures and periods without falsifying them?

OR

QUESTION 5

Literature does not merely communicate a 'message'. Indeed the literary aspect of a work is whatever is left after the 'message' has been subtracted.

Do you agree?

OR

QUESTION 6

The writer creates the world in which we live and breathe and, as Wallace Stevens has suggested, gives to life the supreme fictions without which we are unable to conceive of it.

To what extent is this true?

SECTION III

Attempt ONE question.

EITHER

QUESTION 7. The Nineteenth-Century European Novel

By focusing their works on individuals who refused to conform with accepted convention and morality, were nineteenth-century writers criticising non-conformity or the societies of the time?

Refer in some detail to AT LEAST TWO novels in your discussion.

OR

QUESTION 8. The Nineteenth-Century European Novel

The possible, probable and real are the territory of the novel. This is at once the genre's weakness and its strength.

In what sense may the novel's treatment of humans as creatures in society, and its use of realist techniques, be seen as BOTH a weakness AND a strength?

Refer in some detail to AT LEAST TWO novels in your discussion.

OR

QUESTION 9. Poetry and Religious Experience

'... a kind of conversation that needs no tongue, a perfect interchange of perceptions, moods, questions, answers, that is as simple as the weather... with none of the structures of formal speech.'

DAVID MALOUF, *An Imaginary Life*, p. 145

In what ways is this yearning to transcend the limitations of human communication central to the religious literature you have read in this course?

Write EITHER on NO MORE THAN FIVE poems or extracts, OR on *An Imaginary Life* and NO MORE THAN THREE poems or extracts.

OR

QUESTION 10. Poetry and Religious Experience

'All deities reside in the human breast.'

WILLIAM BLAKE, *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 1790

Does your reading of works in the Poetry & Religious Experience module tend to confirm this view? How?

Write EITHER on NO MORE THAN FIVE poems or extracts, OR on *An Imaginary Life* and NO MORE THAN THREE poems or extracts.

OR

QUESTION 11. Satiric Voices

Much of the power of satire comes from the contrast between the monstrous and the ideal.

Is this an oversimplification?

Answer with reference EITHER to THREE works, OR to TWO major works and several shorter ones such as fables.

OR

QUESTION 12. Satiric Voices

The satirist rebukes all those who do not conform to the manners and morals of his own age.

Do you agree?

Answer with reference EITHER to THREE works, OR to TWO major works and several shorter ones such as fables.

OR

QUESTION 13. Post-Colonial Voices

The post-colonial is not a chronological period but an historical condition, a way of contending with various specific forms of colonial oppression.

Discuss the ways TWO or THREE post-colonial texts deal with oppression.

OR

QUESTION 14. Post-Colonial Voices

If post-colonial writing cannot make new images of self and place, couched in a culturally hybrid language, then it has failed.

Do you agree? Write on TWO or THREE post-colonial works.

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