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DRAMA

Paper 0411/01

Written Paper

General comments

Administration

The number of entries rose very slightly from 521 to 524 for this session. Once again, the majority of Centres coped well with the administrative burden associated with submitting Examination Papers and most work was received in good time. It is greatly appreciated when Centres submit scripts on paper with a right hand margin, tag tied at the corner. This facilitates easy manipulation of and access to the script during the marking process.

The examination

There was evidence of much valuable work in terms of both textual study and response to stimuli. In general, candidates seemed to immerse themselves enthusiastically with the performance stimulus and the outcome was often engaging. Textual study responses suggested that candidates were less enthusiastic when encountering Lorca, which may explain some of the difficulties experienced. Here, many candidates relied on reproducing set responses as taught by Centres, which gave rise to a large number of stereotyped answers lacking in originality and evidence of breadth of understanding. Many candidates did not appear to have a sense of period or background nor how cultural influences impact on the drama. Many candidates ignored these pointers to the extent that their production suggestions took Lorca entirely out of context.

Throughout the examination there was a lack of confidence in applying appropriate terminology, especially in technical process. Where it was applied it often revealed a level of confusion and answers that were not directly relevant to the question.

Section A

Questions 1 - 5: Blood Wedding

Question 1

This question calls for an understanding of the link between the kind of light and the effect that this creates on an audience in terms of their emotional response to the text. Many candidates perceived the need for a bright, airy feel but did not link this with Lorca's setting (i.e. the happy occasion, plenty of openings to let light in). Other candidates indulged themselves in abstract or fanciful suggestions with no apparent understanding of the function and purpose of theatrical lighting, e.g. 'grey', 'red' and 'black' light. A detailed knowledge of stage lighting is not required but an understanding of cause and effect is essential.

Question 2

In most cases candidates responded well to this question, demonstrating insight and understanding in terms of the mother's emotional condition and the motives behind it. Many candidates linked their answers methodically to the text and charted a development in terms of the application of acting technique. Some answers were far too short and only cursorily addressed these issues.

Question 3

This proved to be a major difficulty for most candidates. Some less able candidates confused the motives of the father with those of the mother. The key issues; that of his response to the mother's initial attack and the irony of his comment 'if I had been blessed with sons' eluded the majority of candidates. Consequently, many focused on style of speech or variety of movement or posture and quite a few left the question entirely. Candidates were given the benefit of the doubt where any existed.

Question 4

Candidates engaged well in most cases and gained the advantage, given that five marks were available. The more able candidates were able to bring out the development of tension in the scene and recognise the sub-textual relationship between the Maid and the Bride. The best candidates perceived the potential of quick-fire exchanges and the impact this could achieve.

Question 5

This question asks for a *set design* that captures mood. Regrettably, many candidates ignored both Lorca's stage directions and the content and context of the scene, choosing instead to embark upon flights of symbolic fancy. In doing so they introduced lighting effects, props, and music, often with only tangential reference to the set itself. Period was often ignored to the extent that the stage became populated by sofas, television sets and coffee tables and there seemed to be huge symbolic knives everywhere; projected on the wall, hanging from the ceiling and variously stuck into tables and pieces of fruit!

Some candidates worked on entirely the wrong scene altogether, and very few candidates gave appropriate answers that focused on a practical set in harmony with the demands of the text.

*Questions 6 - 8: Devised Work***Question 6**

The majority of candidates had no problem identifying three important dramatic moments from their performance, although often these were only sketchily drawn. Difficulties arose when they had to describe the skills required to make these moments effective. Strong candidates perceived that skills involve acting technique applied by individual performers or the creation of theatrical impact by the combination of ensemble performance, lighting and music or sound effects. Many candidates simply produced a narrative of what happened in the given scene, thereby losing marks.

Question 7

Narrative again featured very significantly in the candidates' failure to maximise credit. Typically, answers consisted of about half a page, which was a narrative account of the end of the scene followed by a single sentence, stating in simplistic terms what they wanted the audience to feel. Answers lacked a viable discussion about how dramatic impact was achieved and ignored the crafting of material towards the realisation of dramatic goals.

Question 8

This question sought to explore the creation of drama within the context of the *Summer Holidays* stimulus. Many responses were essentially narrative and failed to explore the process of how ideas became performance reality. The "two ways" called for in the question were often overlooked in favour of a more general discussion but there were some really effective answers that managed to convey the methods used to create drama from the source.

Section B*Questions 9 - 11: Staging Blood Wedding***Question 9**

The question requires candidates to explore the use of space in harmony with text. Again, there was a great deal of confusion between staging and set dressing.

In many cases Lorca's set directions were dispensed with and lengthy discussions of lighting effects substituted. Though sketches and diagrams were encouraged, many candidates produced as many as three diagrams, which were too similar to demonstrate effectively the interpretation of textual requirements. Many candidates betrayed a fundamental lack of understanding about how actors interact with sets. For example, whole rooms appear on stage, complete with walls, thereby demonstrating a lack of understanding about sightlines and proxemic relationships. There were far too many unproductive illustrations of set detail, such as mirrors and vases and even costume designs. Candidates wasted much time in creating these, ignoring practical relevance to production.

Question 10

This question was well answered by a high proportion of candidates. Most responses identified the need to portray the distance and coldness in the relationship between Leonardo and his wife. A few responses got side-tracked into too much detailed discussion about the mother-in law and the baby. Again, there seemed to be some confusion over the use of the term “stage” in the sense of “to put on”. This gave rise to more discussion about symbolism, lighting, set and props, which was, for the most part, inappropriate.

Question 11

Few candidates chose this question but those who did tended to concentrate on physicality, such as the creation of dance and stylised movement. Although this is not in itself wrong, it created the impression that candidates were frightened of the language itself as a means of communicating to an audience. A few candidates produced highly creative and original suggestions for the scene, in which music featured strongly but as a co-textural element with the poetry.

Questions 12 - 14: Devised Work - Production

Question 12

There were some good answers here, albeit with a predominance of narrative throughout. Weaker candidates were unable to clarify the notion of “structure” and merely proffered a retelling of the plot.

Question 13

Most candidates identified the key characters in their piece but in the main, there was a lack of understanding about what is meant by bringing them “to life” in dramatic terms. Many answers described their characters’ characteristics and what they “did” in the plot without revealing any understanding of how performance skills were applied to their creation in such a way as to make them “live” for an audience. For less able candidates, the focus rested on appearance, in the sense of costume and, once again, lighting effects (to highlight the character) or even music. Specific acting skills made a very rare appearance.

Question 14

Very few candidates answered this question but those that did revealed a good understanding of how the stage and its surrounding space was utilised. Some Centres seem to have realised some very original production ideas in terms of setting, which at once provided an excellent vehicle for the action and an environment that fostered audience engagement. This clearly enabled candidates to answer the question appropriately.

Paper 0411/02 Coursework
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General comments**Administration**

In this second year of the revised CIE syllabus, numbers of entries rose significantly from 365 to 521. The majority of Centres appeared more at ease with the administration associated with submitting coursework and most completed the documentation to a very high standard. There was evidence that many Centres had found the CIE website helpful in answering frequently-asked questions; Moderators reported that this had made significant improvements in administration of the coursework.

Forms and commentaries

Following feedback from Centres in June 2002 it was decided to implement revised Coursework Working Mark Sheets for future sessions. These had already been published in the 2004 syllabus although some Centres were unaware of this and used the previous forms. The correct forms are printed in both the 2004 and 2005 syllabuses and there should be no confusion in future years. In essence the procedure is straightforward: there is a form that relates to text-based pieces and a separate form that applies to original devised pieces. This means that only the assessment objectives that apply to any given piece are printed on the form. When all pieces are complete, a set should be collated for each candidate and an overall average calculated for each Assessment Objective. This is explained in detail in the 2004 and 2005 syllabuses.

A number of Centres had downloaded the electronic version of the syllabus and were able to type comments directly onto the Coursework Assessment Forms. This was most helpful to Moderators and was probably also helpful to Tutors. Centres are encouraged to use this method in future sessions.

Video recordings

Virtually all videos were submitted in UK-usable VHS format this session and CIE is grateful to those Centres who made such an enormous effort to obtain tapes to support this, even to the point of importing them. It should be noted that CIE cannot guarantee accepting tapes for Moderation in any other format. There was an improvement in candidates identifying themselves on video and this was achieved by a variety of means. The most successful method was through candidates holding up a large piece of card with their name and candidate number on and holding this for ten seconds whilst the video paused on them.

Moderators reported that the Moderation process ran most smoothly where Centres presented the individual pieces on a separate tape to the group pieces. It was also helpful if the composition of the groups remained the same for both of the group's pieces since this made for a more efficient portfolio and fewer extraneous candidates. The Moderation Sample remained at six candidates per Centre as in previous years.

Whilst the majority of videos were well-filmed and provided sufficient evidence to justify the marks awarded, some videos were rather dark and this meant that it was difficult to distinguish actors from one another. In a few other instances there were problems with the quality of the sound. In one case, the lens cap had been left on the video camera resulting in sound but no vision.

Comments on specific pieces

Individual pieces

The majority of individual pieces were taken from repertoire although there were some very notable pieces of individual devised pieces, especially those which grew directly from local situations. Some candidates had clearly worked hard with their Tutors to identify repertoire and had taken care to select appropriate extracts from longer plays. Other candidates had simply selected entries from commercially available books of audition pieces. These tended to be less well executed, often because the candidates had little understanding of the relationship of the extract to the overall piece.

There was a particular problem with static performances where candidates adopted a 'talking heads' approach. This was no doubt an attempt to create something akin to television drama but relied too often on meaningful pauses combined with occasional facial gestures.

Standards of articulation were generally good but a small minority of candidates needed considerably more rehearsal for their delivery to be comprehensible. Centres should guide candidates to repertoire appropriate to their abilities and aspirations since there is no credit for undertaking work beyond their technical level of ability.

Group pieces

Centres are reminded that groups should contain between two and six candidates. Centres should not use their main school production as a means of assessing a group piece. There were a few instances of this which meant that it was difficult to distinguish candidates from other performers.

Whilst the individual pieces were generally of an appropriate length, there was a tendency for some group pieces to be longer than allowed. Centres should take care to enforce the maximum time length for all pieces since it was almost always the case that over-long pieces reduced the effectiveness of the drama. A fifteen minute piece is ample for each member of a group of six candidates to demonstrate their drama skills over a sustained period. Individual pieces were generally more carefully timed and paced.

Repertoire

There was a very wide range of repertoire used, both for individual and group pieces. The single most represented dramatist was, perhaps predictably, William Shakespeare, particularly in the individual work. The most able candidates were able to make Shakespeare's language come alive but Moderators equally reported the number of candidates who stumbled over language that clearly had little meaning for them. English dramatists other than Shakespeare were also frequently used. Oscar Wilde, Tom Stoppard and John Osborne were used effectively within Centres to complement work from playwrights from around the world. There were some particularly fine performances of work by Athol Fugard, perhaps inspired by last year's study of *No Good Friday for Paper 1*. Strindberg, Tennessee Williams and Ibsen were also frequent choices for repertoire. Centres are reminded, however, that candidates are prohibited from performing the current year's extract for Paper 1, in this case Lorca's *Blood Wedding*.

Devising

The quality of the devised work was often stronger in performance whilst being weaker in its construction. To some extent this was not unexpected and Moderators reported that candidates often performed their own material with a greater sense of ownership. Even candidates whose articulation was weak in repertoire came alive when presented with the opportunity to perform work they had produced themselves.

The reverse of this, however, is that weak structures often left candidates with little room for manoeuvre in terms of pacing and contrast. There was far too much heavy reliance on tables-and-chairs drama which appeared to exist in a cultural vacuum. This produced dramatic structures more akin to television soap operas than to drama intended for live performance; angst rather than drama was prevalent. Centres are encouraged to intervene as candidates prepare their coursework so that they do not settle for devised structures that may ultimately impede their ability to do well in performance.

If costume was a potential distraction in repertoire performances, lighting was a parallel problem in devised work with many candidates opting for low levels of lighting. On video, this depressed the atmosphere heavily and also gave the impression of a very low energy level. Similarly, props such as teddy bears and beds appeared more frequently than was helpful in creating drama with any sense of energy or focus. The greatest single problem reported by Moderators was the number of static scenes requiring little physical involvement with the work. It is hoped that the energy and attack of the best devised work will inspire future candidates to question their working methods and performance intentions in order to produce more rigorous and flexible performance structures.