

ENGLISH TRIPOS
PART II

Date Friday 23 May 2008

Time 14.00 – 17.00

PAPER 2
TRAGEDY

Answer *either* one *or* three questions.

You must, in the paper as a whole, show substantial knowledge of both Greek and Shakespearean Tragedy. This should be taken to mean that at least one sixth of your writing (e.g. half of a one-hour essay, or a comparable proportion of the writing for the paper as a whole) must be devoted to Greek Tragedy, and a further sixth must be devoted to Shakespearean Tragedy.

Candidates choosing to answer one question only should bear in mind that not all questions will be suited to this option.

*You are expected to make specific and detailed comment on individual works throughout your answer(s). Do **not** use the same material twice, **either** in this paper **or** in the examination as a whole.*

Stationery Requirements

20 page booklets x 1

Rough work pads x 1

Tags

You may not start to read the questions printed on the subsequent pages of this question paper until instructed that you may do so by the Invigilator.

1. 'When the age loses the tragic, it gains despair.' (SØREN KIERKEGAARD)

2. 'Poetic justice is one of the first casualties of tragedy.' (A.D. NUTTALL)

3. 'Tragedy is essentially retrospective, an act of response.'
Discuss.

4. 'Tragedy is only possible to a mind which is for the moment agnostic ... The least touch of any theology that has a compensating Heaven to offer the tragic hero is fatal.' (I.A. RICHARDS)

'We might say that every tragic hero is born innocent: he becomes guilty in order to save God.' (ROLAND BARTHES)

Is there place for God in tragedies, or for tragedy in a religious framework?

5. 'Tragedy, then, is mimesis of an action which is elevated, complete, and of magnitude; ... employing the mode of enactment, not narrative.' (ARISTOTLE)

Examine some of the ideas in this statement in relation to the practices of tragedy.

6. 'I pity you but I can't bear to look / I've much to ask, so much to learn / So much fascinates my eyes, / But you ... I shudder at the sight.' (Chorus in SOPHOCLES, *Oedipus the King*)

Either (a) Examine the complexities of response that tragic art elicits.

Or (b) Discuss the functions of the chorus in Greek tragedy **and/or** later efforts to replace or rework it.

Or (c) Explore the significance of the activity of looking in tragedies.

7. "[T]he worst is not / So long as we can say 'This is the worst.'" (WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Lear*)

8. 'Fail again. Fail better.' (SAMUEL BECKETT, *Worstward Ho*)

9. **Either** (a) How fluid are the boundaries between tragedy and other genres? Discuss with reference to **one or two** other genre(s) of your choice.

Or (b) 'Comedy is felt to be artificial and escapist; tragedy, toughly real. The opposite view seems more accurate. Tragedy is tender to man's dignity and self-importance, and preserves the illusion that he is a noble creature.' (JOHN CAREY)
Discuss.

10. 'About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters; how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along'
(W.H. AUDEN)

Examine some of the ways in which tragic art locates the human position of suffering. You may consider dramatic, narrative, visual or operatic representations, or a combination of these.

11. 'Tragedy arises when men press for full knowledge...' (GABRIEL JOSIPOVICI)
Examine the tragic potential of knowledge, false knowledge, or the urge to know.

12. 'The lyric and the tragic belong to opposite impulses. The greater the focus on the rhetoric of lament, the less the tragic impact.'
Do tragic works bear out this statement?

13. **Either** (a) What relation could there be between a sense of place and a tragic sense of life?

Or (b) Discuss **one or two** of the following as sites of tragedy:

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| (i) the bed | (iv) the household |
| (ii) the city | (v) the battlefield |
| (iii) the study | (f) thresholds. |

14. 'Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.'
(ABEL MEEROPOL; first sung by Billie Holiday, 1938)

Either (a) Explore the relation between tragic experience and metaphor.

Or (b) Examine **at least two** treatments of tragic experience in music.

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15. **Either** (a) Can 'passive suffering' be a theme for tragedy?
Or (b) 'But it is not you who bury me, younger though you are, but I you – an old woman without city or children, burying a wretched corpse' (Hecabe in EURIPIDES, *Trojan Women*)
Write on old age, **or** on children, as a subject of tragedy.

16. **Either** (a) 'I ... / Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor poor dumb mouths, / And bid them speak for me.' (Antony, in SHAKESPEARE, *Julius Caesar*)
Discuss the tragic uses of wounds.
Or (b) '[I]n all violence, he could not help discerning, strangely, a literary kernel...' (ROLAND BARTHES)
Consider the ethics and perversities of writing about violence. You may consider representations of violence in non-verbal media if you wish.

17. 'Regular rhythm, form in poetry is like the mask: it enables you to go beyond the scream as a reaction to events that in the normal course of life would make you do just that.' (PETER HALL).
Examine the function of **either** poetic form **or** the mask in tragic works.

18. 'For there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it. A new Theresa will hardly have the opportunity of reforming a conventual life, any more than a new Antigone will spend her heroic piety in daring all for the sake of a brother's burial: the medium in which their ardent grief took shape is for ever gone.'

(GEORGE ELIOT, *Middlemarch*)

Either (a) How dependent is tragic heroism on social, historical or generic 'medium'?
Or (b) Do female protagonists have to negotiate particular challenges in order to gain tragic stature? If so, by what means?

19. 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (MARK 15.34)
'I believe in my / Abandonment, since it is what I have.' (GEOFFREY HILL)
How do tragic works give voice to abandonment?

20. 'But to persever
In obstinate condolement is a course
Of impious action, 'tis unmanly grief' (SHAKESPEARE, *Hamlet*)

'Is there something to be gained from grieving, from tarrying with grief, from remaining exposed to its unbearability and not endeavouring to seek a resolution for grief through violence?' (JUDITH BUTLER)
Discuss the relation between grief, time and action in tragedies.

21. **Either** (a) ‘Tragedies start in calm and end in tempest.’ (THOMAS HEYWOOD)

How predictive are the openings of tragedies?

Or (b) ‘*Kent* Is this the promised end?

Edgar Or image of that horror?’ (SHAKESPEARE, *King Lear*)

What do tragedies do with ‘promised ends’?

22. Consider the role of **one or two** of the following in the *performance* of **at least two** tragedies:

(i) kneeling

(iv) ritual

(ii) singing

(v) competition

(iii) laughter

(vi) ghosts

23. '[T]ragedy as a form of drama is not universal. Oriental art knows violence, grief, and the stroke of natural or contrived disaster; the Japanese theatre is full of ferocity and ceremonial death. But that representation of personal suffering and heroism which we call tragic drama is distinctive of the Western tradition.' (GEORGE STEINER)

Examine the merits of this claim with reference to any non-Western dramatic tradition(s).

24. ‘Yet I must not be passionless like a statue, but maintain all relations natural and acquired.’ (EPICTETUS)

Consider the tragic function of the passions, **or** of their containment.

25. ‘To see sad sights moves more than hear them told.’ (SHAKESPEARE, *Lucrece*)

Discuss the relative, sometimes competitive, claims of **at least two** different media to an effective representation of the tragic.

26. ‘[W]hile tragic theory insists for the most part upon one version of tragedy, tragic practice tends to illustrate another; and this incongruity, which runs back to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, is deep-seated and persistent enough to suggest that it constitutes a cultural problem in its own right.’ (TERRY EAGLETON)

Examine the relation between tragic theory and tragic practice, with reference to tragic experience.

END OF PAPER